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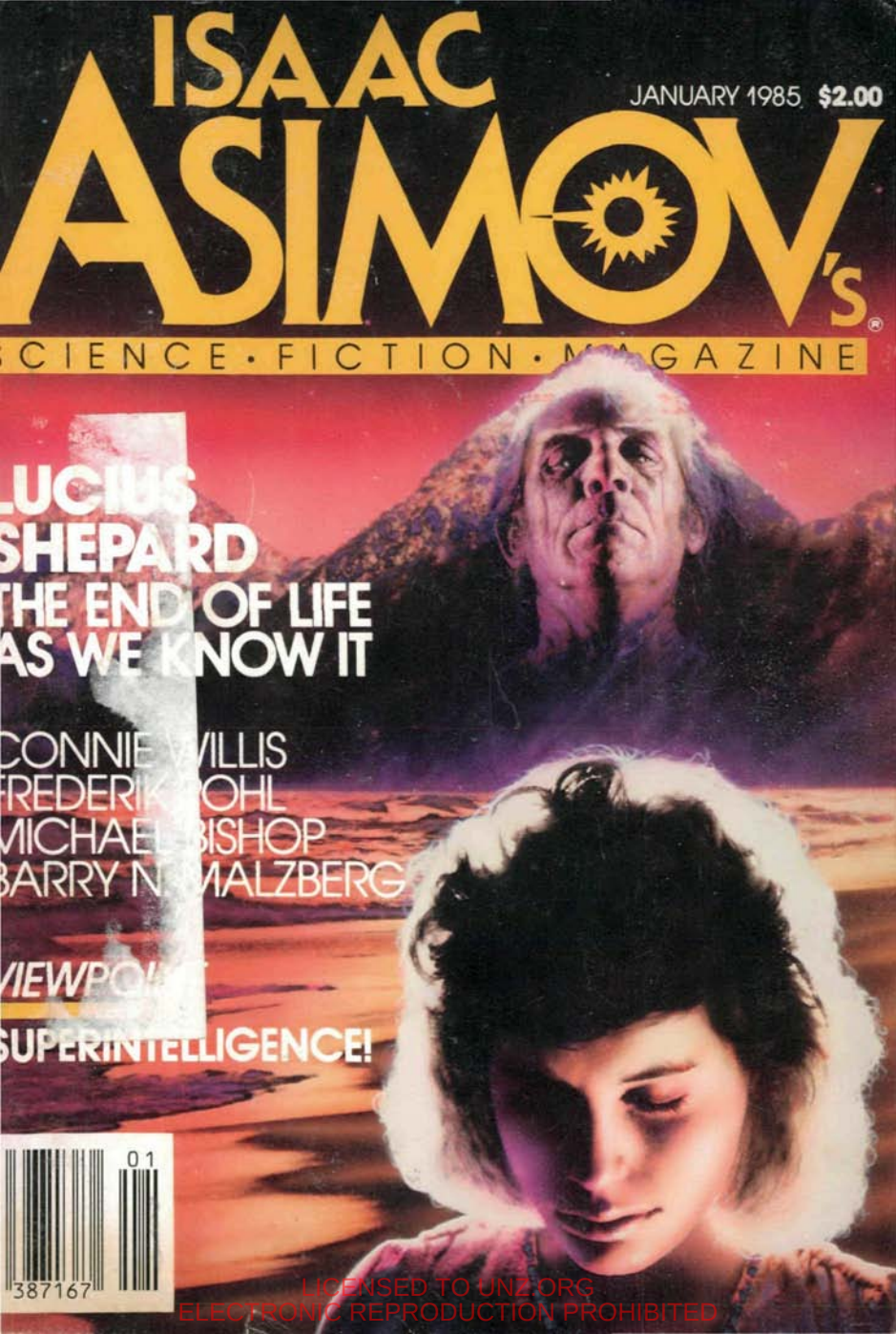

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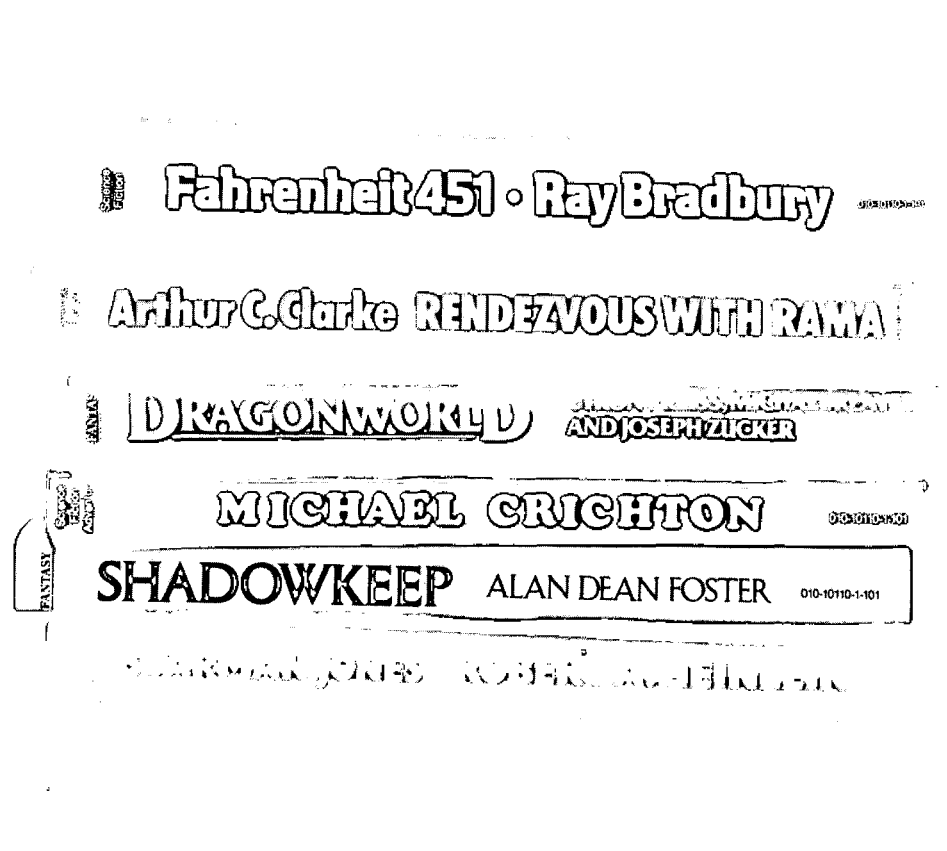

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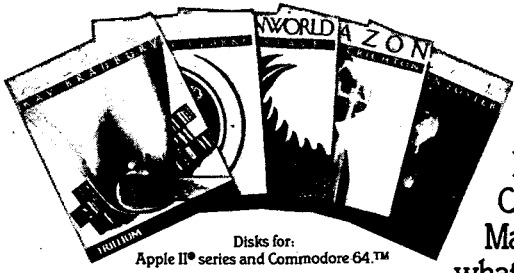

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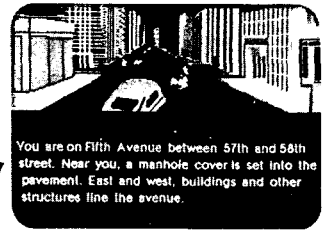
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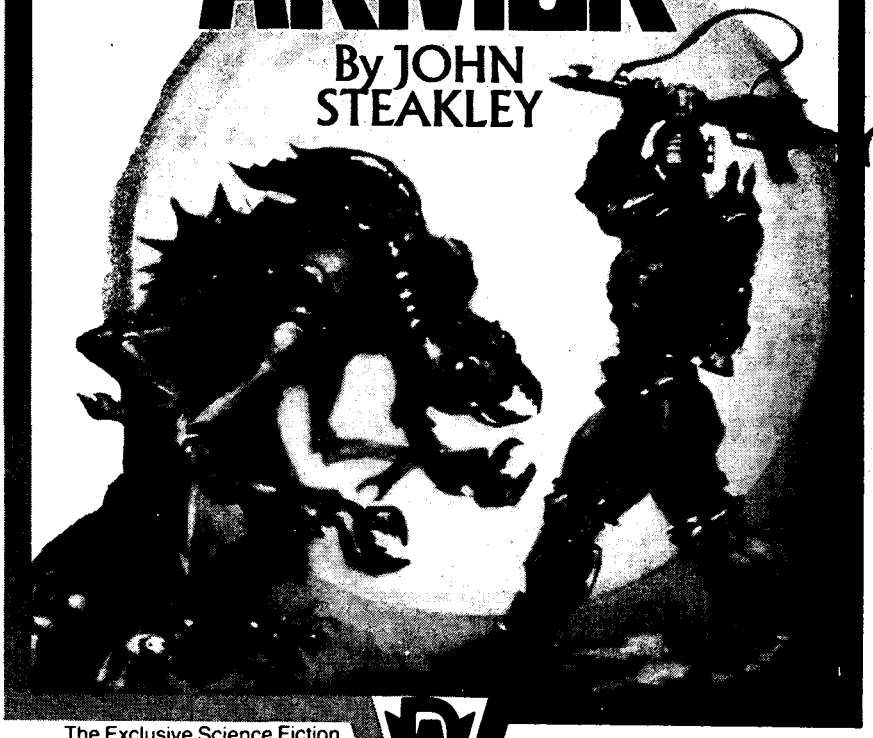

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Cover art for "The End of Life As We Know It" by J.K. Potter

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Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.00 per copy. Annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1984 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IAsfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN 0162-2188.

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

SWORD AND SORCERY

I don't represent myself as an expert on the history of science fiction and its various sister-fields and cousin-fields, but I suspect I won't be far wrong if I say that the contemporary sword-and-sorcery tale owes its existence to the imagination of Robert Howard and to his invention of the Conan stories.

Part of the success of this type of story lies in the fascination of the bulging muscles and incredible strength and fortitude of the hero. I imagine that amost any male would at least occasionally wish he had biceps as hard as chrome-steel and could wield a fifty-pound sword as though it were a bamboo cane and could use it to cleave vile caitiffs to the chine. Imagine singlehandedly putting fifty assailants to flight with a sword in one hand and a fainting damsel in the other?

Oddly enough, I shudder at such things. I have lived so thoroughly effete a life, and am such a failure at suspending some kinds of disbelief, that I remain too conscious of what a hero must smell like after having performed such feats and I've never read of one of them using a deodorant even once. It seems to me that the Conans of the world must rescue maidens from fates worse than death only to subject them to other fates worse than death.

Of course, maidens might like that sort of thing, and so might damsels—but I don't really know. I've never put them to that particular test.

Heroes date back much farther than Conan, you may be sure. They are as old as literature, and the most consistently popular ones are notable for their muscles and not much else. As Anna Russell says of Siegfried, who is the hero of Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen," such heroes are "very brave, very strong, very handsome, and very, *very* stupid."

You can find such heroes in almost every culture. The Sumerians had Gilgamesh, the Greeks had Heracles, the Hebrews had Samson, the Persians had Rustem, the Irish had Cuchulain, and so on. Each one of them would get into all

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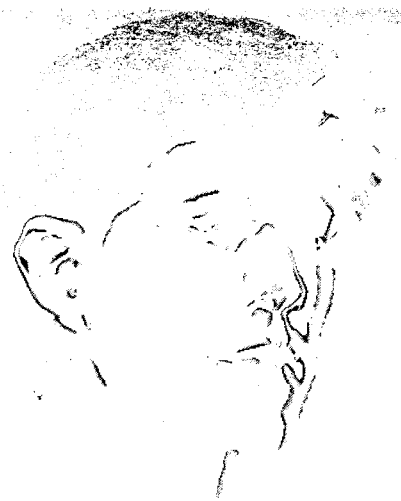

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kinds of trouble since any child could deceive and entrap them, and they then had to depend on their superhuman strength, and nothing else, to get out of the trouble.

It took the ancient Greeks to come up with something better. In the *Iliad*, the hero is Achilles, another killing-machine. In the *Odyssey*, however, the hero is Odysseus, who is an efficient enough fighter (he wouldn't have been allowed in any self-respecting epic, otherwise) but, in addition, he had *brains*.

There is a tale that is not told in the *Iliad*, but is referred to in the *Odyssey* and is elaborated by poets after Homer, to the effect that after the death of Achilles, there was a question as to which of the Greek heroes deserved to take over Achilles' glorious god-manufactured armor. One of the claimants was Ajax, who was second only to Achilles in strength and was very likely the least intelligent of the heroes, and the other was Odysseus. It was a case of brawn versus brain.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story is told particularly well. Ajax stands up to state his case to the assembled Greeks, and tells of the long, harsh battles in which he was a staunch bulwark, in which his mighty arm fended off the Trojans, and of the time he singly defended the ships at a low point in the war.

When I read this for the first time, I was impressed. Ajax convinced me. I didn't see how it was possible for Odysseus, a fighter of lesser strength, to maintain his claim to the armor. But then, the wise Odysseus arose and totally demolished Ajax's arguments. It was not simple strength, not the mere clash of sword and shield that was deciding the war, but strategy . . . policy . . . *thought*. I cheered Odysseus and so did the Greeks, and he got the armor. Poor Ajax went mad with frustration and killed himself.

There is a touching passage in the *Odyssey* that serves as a postscript. Odysseus visits the underworld, and sees relatives and friends who had passed away; including his mother and Achilles. Ajax is there, too, and Odysseus approaches the dead hero with friendly words, but Ajax moves away silently. Even after death, he cannot forgive.

In other cultures, too, there is the occasional tale of brute strength defeated. One of the great stories is that of David and Goliath, the little man defeating the giant by clever choice of weapons. Reynard the Fox defeats the threatening wolves, bears, and lions in the medieval animal tales, and so does Br'er Rabbit in the American folktales.

In this battle of brains and brawn, however, the audience is never quite at ease with the victory of brains. The uncomplicated Lancelots and Rolands are cheered to the echo, but clever victors are often met with a certain reserve and suspicion. In many post-Homeric legends, Odysseus is represented as

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an unprincipled schemer and physical coward. The cleverness of the fox and rabbit is usually represented as based on lies and dishonesty.

In legends, the clever character is often envisaged as someone smart enough to control aspects of the Universe through his superior knowledge and wisdom. He is a magician or sorcerer. There are occasionally magicians who are on the side of right and who serve the physical hero, as Merlin serves King Arthur. Sometimes, they even *are* the hero, as Vainamoinen is, for instance, in the Finnish legends.

Very often, though, the magician is the villain, who threatens the hero with sneaky enchantments, who fights from behind the protective wall of his powers. Our poor hero, who fights in the open with simple and honest thwacks of his sword, must somehow reach and destroy the cowardly, unethical magician.

Clearly, the readers are expected to feel that it is noble and admirable for the hero to pit his own superhuman strength against the lesser physiques of his enemies, and also to feel that there is something perfidious about a magician pitting his own superhuman intelligence against the lesser wit of his enemies.

This double standard is very evident in sword-and-sorcery, in which the Sword-hero (brawn) is pitted against the Sorcery-villain (brain), with brawn winning every time.

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The convention is, furthermore, that brawn is always on the side of goodness and niceness (a proposition which, in real life, is very dubious). This is similar to the convention in Westerns, in which all disputes are decided by which character can draw his gun the fastest and shoot the straightest. It is then understood that the clean and virtuous White-hat is always the fastest and straightest shooter, a proposition which must surely be a variety of wishful thinking impossible to justify in any realistic fashion.

Science fiction, in its early days, often fell into this cliché of smart-is-wicked. Think of all the mad scientists who populated the stories published during the first decade of the science fiction magazines to say nothing of the comic strips and movies ever since. Think of all the Flash Gordons who have pitted their mighty thews, and their stupidity, against the evil intelligence of the Mings—and won.

I don't say that I don't enjoy this, too. I particularly like it when it is leavened with a sense of humor, as it was in the case of the television mini-series "Wizards and Warriors." However, the fact is that in the history of the large mammalian predators, humanity came out as sovereign by virtue of brain over brawn, and heroic fantasy would reverse the decision and give the victory to the lions and elephants. (If you disapprove of what human beings are doing to the Earth—as I do—you may wish the lions and elephants *had* won, but I'm not saying that brains are Good, merely that they are Victors.)

Present-day science fiction has, as one of the characteristics that differentiate it from other forms of fiction, a tendency toward the deification of reason. Scientists are sometimes heroes, and intelligence is very frequently the weapon that must be used, even by those who are not scientists, to solve the problems posed. In my own stories, I almost never make use of violence, and even when I do, it is never the means whereby the crisis is resolved. In my stories, it is a case of reason against reason, with the superior brain winning. (And sometimes it is not completely clear that the superior brain represents the cause of Right and Good, for I have the uneasy feeling that Right does not always triumph—or is even always clearly definable.)

The definition of "good science fiction" ought to include, then, the tendency to have problems solved by the use of brains—the human specialty—rather than by the use of stupid strength.

Not all heroic fantasy takes the reverse stand. In Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" intelligence is exalted. Nevertheless, I consider the typical sword-and-sorcery tale to be anti-science-fiction; to be the very opposite of science fiction. It is for that reason that you are not likely to find anything of the sort published in this magazine, unless it is particularly exceptional in its characteristics. O

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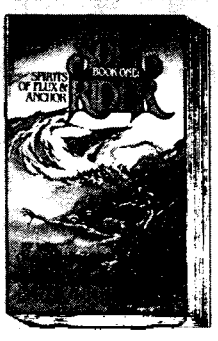

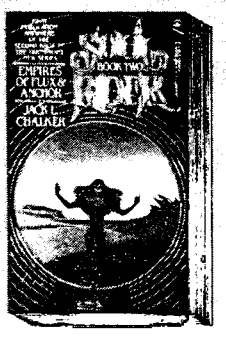

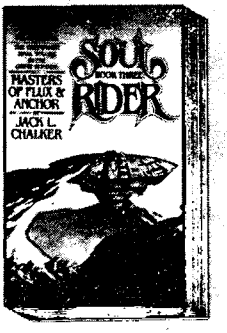

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LETTERS

Dear Isaac, et al.:

I've been a reader of your magazine since approximately September 1978, and have watched with interest its slow (or perhaps not all that slow) metamorphosis. I have a little piece of advice for you: do exactly as you have been doing in running your magazine! As each change has come about, you have received letters saying that this was a good idea or a bad one, or that the general tone or content was biased too much to one genre or another, and, "Would you please change one or more aspect(s) of your fine publication to suit *me*?"

I've noticed that nearly all the changes have been improvements, and others have not stayed. I could draw a number of possible conclusions from this. 1. Your taste and mine are nearly identical: maybe, but not very likely. 2. You have carefully analyzed your readers' complaints and praises and tailored your magazine appropriately: probably not; nothing worthwhile was ever designed by a committee—at least not a committee of thousands. There are two other possibilities that I'm drawn to: the first is that you have an almost unerring sense of what makes a harmonious whole (or have hired someone who does, and have the good sense not to interfere). The second is that your editorial policy is not nearly as concerned with genres and biases as it is with the quality of the items you accept in terms of plot, characterization, readability, etc.; in short, the literary quality of the magazine. I believe both of these last two possibilities are true.

You may consider reader response on every change you make, for instance, but I'm sure that if your inner sense ran contrary to the bulk of your mail on any given issue, you'd follow your own counsel—not your readers'. And I'm sure you'd be right.

Another issue which has come up is the thematic content of individual issues. While you have stated that there is no attempt to mold any given issue to a specific theme, even a casual survey of the past year's output would lead one almost inescapably to the opposite conclusion. Consider: the May 1984 issue had three stories which could be loosely grouped in the "ghost story" or "supernatural" category: "Buzzy Gone Blue," "Close of Night" and "Still Life With Scorpion." June has three alien/human interaction stories: "Bloodchild," a disgusting little thing, although well-written, even *engrossing*, so to speak, "Saint Theresa of the Aliens," and "The Pool of Manhead

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Song." I could go on with specifics about issues or series of issues with a preponderance of stories which seem to experiment with specific themes; pessimistic endings; stories with few or no sympathetic characters; stories concerned with weird sex or reproduction.

I won't belabor the point, though. Even though I may remark negatively on some of these things, I don't object to the idea. In fact, I like it. I do wish you'd give a more complete answer to the suggestion there is indeed some factor at work here which seems to cause some (not all) issues to have a central theme. Is it collective unconscious? Just the general mood swings of your staff? Do you suppose the mass media have such a homogenizing effect that umpteen writers just happen to end up dwelling on the same sort of thing more or less simultaneously? And of course, it wouldn't have to be simultaneously. It occurs to me that you might receive sufficient volume of manuscripts to be able, at least some of the time, to set up thematic trends or groupings. Is this true?

One last thing: the blue noses seem to be nipping at your heels again. The occasional sex scene has some of them all a-flutter. My own opinion is that it's a fresh breeze blowing across the desert. Let me reiterate: I think your sense of the appropriate, of the harmonious, is very nearly unerring. Follow your own inner compass.

Thank you for your time. Feel free to edit this as you see fit, if you decide to use it.

Sincerely,

Stephen C. Coquet
Portland, OR

A further word about censorship from his spouse:

I don't recall that my mother ever barred my exposure to any reading material, idea, philosophy, theology or pictorial matter. She couldn't have. I read constantly, omnivorously from age five or so, and the entire family was delighted with my thirst for the written word. If she had tried to prevent my consuming lurid trash along with The Classics, I'd have either given up reading, or learned to *sneak*. I wouldn't have had the valuable input she gave: "Do you think that story is about the sort of marriage you want?" "Do you think people who believe in that are happy?" "Do you think that political system would make you more or less free?"

In my days of radical politics, we argued vehemently, but never bitterly. I never blindly espoused a cause. My mother, you see, had taught me to be a critical reader. When I discovered steamy sex (written variety), I *knew* it wasn't a love story. It was exciting, but it wasn't love.

You don't train a gourmet by feeding them oatmeal. You don't train a critical reader by only exposing them to *Reader's Digest*. You don't teach a child to think by limiting his exposure to ideas. I sympathize with the mother whose young daughter reads *IAsfm*: I'm raising a daughter, too. And I know I'll have to swallow a lot of impulsive words when *she* hauls home a tattered copy of *Fanny Hill*. I hope I view it as an opportunity, rather than a problem. I hope I have the courage my mother did. I hope I

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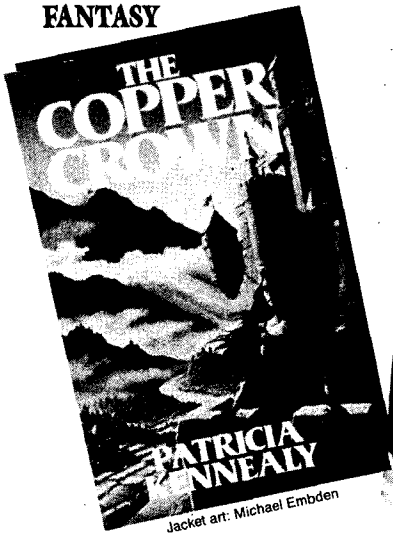

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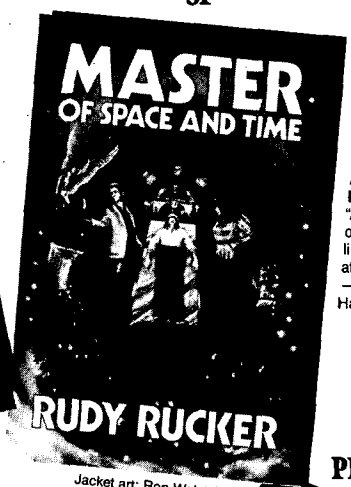

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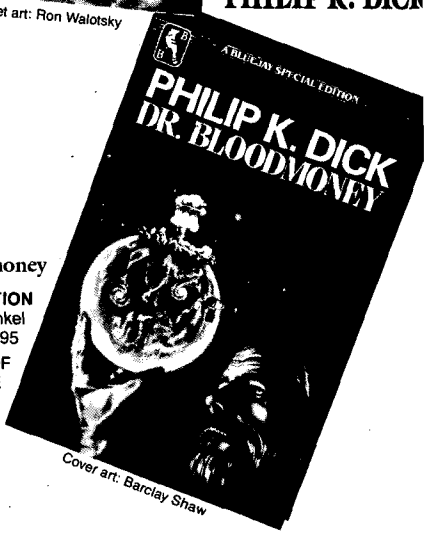

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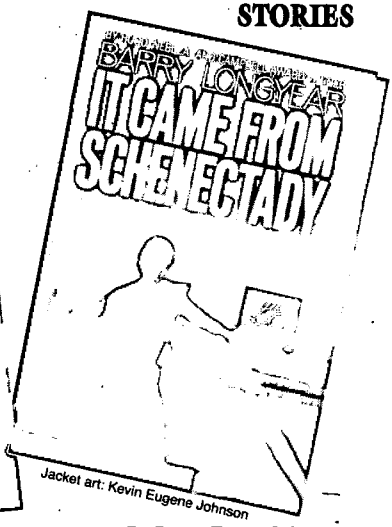

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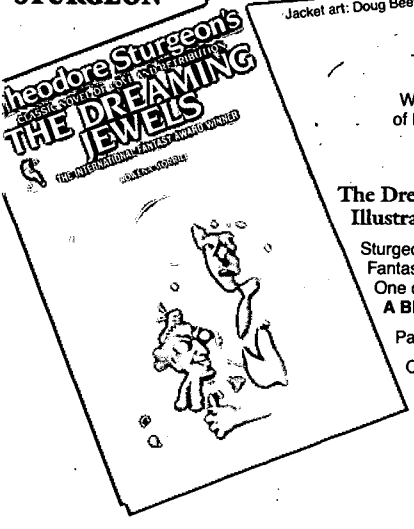

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can raise a child who doesn't think every written word is true, or every written idea is one to live by. Oatmeal isn't bad; but there's chocolate mousse out there, too!

Peggy Coquet

I suspect that you feel I am responsible for what you like about the magazine. Actually, I am responsible only in the sense that I have favored Shawna for her present position as editor, and that I recognize her extreme ability in that role, and am willing to give her a completely free hand.

—Isaac Asimov

It seems that readers sometimes discover what seems to be a "thematic grouping," as you put it, in given issues of the magazine. I'm afraid, though, that I can't take any of the credit (or blame) for this. In fact, I try to avoid it when I can. However, the exigencies of putting an issue of the magazine together sometimes make it impossible to avoid running several stories with the same basic theme in the same issue.

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have just read the May issue and I am proud of the courage you have shown in the editorial and in your answer to Mr. Bray in the Letters section. Your support of the Bill of Rights and the right of people not just to be different but to live different is very important in the face of rising intolerance and rigid belief systems. It is important that people who have standing in the community should speak out in support of these principles during a time when millions of dollars are being spent to convince Americans that the Bill of Rights should only protect the godly.

When I renew my subscription I shall purchase a second subscription and leave it to yourself to direct the additional subscription to a needy person.

I wish I could believe that the rational and kindly philosophy so evident in you was or is the hallmark of our nation.

Sincerely yours,

James Ethan Yell
Parkville, MO

I can't help but feel that most people are *rational and kindly, when left to their own impulses. The loudest voices are always, however, from the self-righteous and ultra-narrow, and they have the capacity to frighten many into silence or even into placatory agreement.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

The stories related by Mr. Spinrad and others you hear now and then about precognitive dreams are intriguing, even shocking, to the person involved, but not convincing to the public at large.

Perhaps I can offer a reason. The fact is that those dreams are only a handful out of billions of dreams that are dreamt in just the U.S. in one year alone—99.99 etc. percent of the people never have a precognitive dream in their entire lifetime.

I suspect that these dreams would fit comfortably within the random coincidence provided for by the

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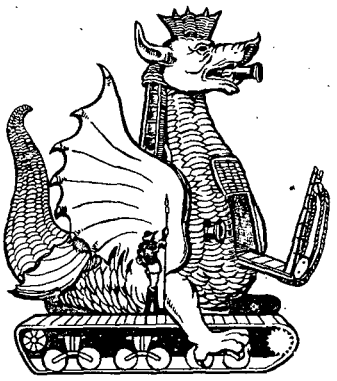

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laws of probability for recurring events. Remember, the monkey, the typewriter, time, and the novel *War and Peace.*

Sorry to be such a spoilsport!

Yours truly,

John D. van Dyke
212 S. El Camino Real #24
San Mateo, CA 94401

I agree with you completely. It seems to me also that after a dream "comes true," the details of the dream, when it is told, shift into ever-better agreement with the eventual fact. It's not even a question of deliberate lying; just a human tendency to remember what one wishes to remember. And there is no objective way of checking the description either.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I'd like to add my support to your decision to publish controversial stories in your magazine. I feel that most people read science fiction to gain new perspectives on the universe, not to have relatively narrow viewpoints comfortably affirmed.

Regarding your June editorial, however, I'd like to point out that one reason writers may avoid the time machine story wherein the traveler goes back to the time of Christ is probably because Michael Moorcock dealt with this concept so brilliantly in his short novel, *Behold the Man* (Avon, 1968). I do recommend reading this one if you've overlooked it; it's fascinating, as well as gleefully perverse.

Elaine Radford
New Orleans, LA

Mea culpa! Several readers pointed out Moorcock's story, which (I am sorry to say) I have never read. Still, since it is impossible for me to keep up with every bit of SF written these days and still keep up my own writing schedule, I should be sensible enough to avoid such absolutes as "No story has ever been written—"

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov
and Ms. McCarthy:

Many thanks for your having published Octavia Butler's short story, "Bloodchild."

Students of science fiction writing should take a long, hard gander at this piece. Ms. Butler takes a bunch of very deeply rooted human fears—among them fear of insects, fear of parasites, and fear of confinement—plus an old SF theme —aliens using humans as hosts for their young—and completely rejuggles all these elements to tell a fresh story.

Her aliens were real people, as individually variable as the story's humans. In fact, the humans are the aliens, and the aliens conservationists as well as parasites (or, rather, symbiotes). And as in all good stories, the main characters change along the way.

A real gem, this one; I wish I'd written it. Butler deserves an award for it. So do your art people: the cover and interior illustrations for "Bloodchild" were breathtaking.

By the way, I was interested that Butler's human protagonists were Asian, despite the fact that her story had nothing to do with Terran Asian culture. I guess the fact

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that I noticed shows that I'm not yet free of that prejudice that says "human" and conjures "Caucasian male heterosexual." Nonetheless, I appreciated this light bit of consciousness-raising.

Yours sincerely,

Rand B. Lee
Key West, FL

Who knows, "Bloodchild" may yet win an award. The advantage of publishing daring and innovative fiction is that critical esteem may be gained. The disadvantage is that some readers may object.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I read with considerable interest your discussion of the use in your magazine of stories dealing with religion. I think you are begging the question. It is not a matter of whether or not it is appropriate to use stories which have a basis in some type of religion. It is a question of whether there is a discernible bias for or against a certain religion.

We have been taking your magazine for a number of years, and we feel the anti-Christian bias is so apparent that we look each month for the mandatory anti-Christian story right along with the mandatory after-the-nuclear-holocaust story.

We have not found an anti-Judaism story, nor an anti-Buddhist or Islam story. The religions of mythology are dealt with sympathetically, and what a charming story Tanith Lee gave us recently, reflecting Hindu mysticism!

Of course, your bias is reflected in much of the media; however, you are distinguished in picking on the Catholic religion at least as frequently as on the Protestants. I suppose this is refreshing in a negative sort of a way; we are so bored with the stereotype of the uptight, prudish, narrow Protestant in literature.

We have considered not renewing for this reason, and will do so with some regrets, since the family finds some stories in each issue which are rewarding. Of course, we don't expect our religion to be treated sympathetically or not treated at all—but we would expect (law of averages) to see it *occasionally* given a fair shake.

Please don't tell me it is because all your writers are scientists and scientists are unbelievers. My husband is a Ph.D. chemist-chem. engineer and has his own consulting firm. He and most of his high-tech associates are Christians.

Thank you for reading this and for considering my premise.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Henry F. Coffer
Las Vegas, NV

Bias is sometimes in the eye of the beholder, madam.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir:

Your editorial in the June *IAsfm* was so appropriate that I read most of it to my class. The course involved is the one that makes me one of the two people I know (the other is Bob Smith at Colgate) who teach science fiction as part of a college *religion* curriculum. My excuse is that SF is the primary my-

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thology (in the best sense of the term) of the 20th Century. So I have a special interest in stories like "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis."

You leave me with the impression that much of the criticism of the story centered on the chapter and verse form. Since the original Scriptures were written neither in chapters and verses nor in Elizabethan English, I find this objection so trivial as to border on the silly.

It might be more to the point to take issue with the choice of those who play the roles originally assigned to Pontius Pilate and the Pharisees. But we should remember that Pilate represented the legal system that produced the *Pax Romana* and that the Pharisees were responsible for one of the most admired systems of morality in the Empire. Therefore, the more respectable and honored the group that destroys Mantikhoras, the greater the verisimilitude of the story. To have had her killed by some equivalent to the Parthians would have been to miss the point.

Finally, one might question the theology. In *Out of the Silent Planet* C. S. Lewis suggests that earth may be the only planet that needs a redeemer. But if Lewis is wrong about that, and if I suspend my disbelief in the physical possibility of giant insects, then Bishop has clearly remained within the limits of the incarnationist theology that the Christian Church has taught since the Council of Nicea. In fact, I may use the story to clarify the doctrine for my Confirmation class.

To put the last three paragraphs more briefly: as a born again, evangelical Christian, and as an ordained minister in good standing with my bishop, I do not find "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis" objectionable. I hope that you will continue to publish "religious" stories.

On the other hand, some objection might be taken to "Saint Theresa of the Aliens." I do not think that militant bigotry is so endemic to religion. If I am wrong I may meet you at the barricades or on the scaffold. Meanwhile, keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

John D. Garhart
Oneonta, NY

Thank you very much. I naturally warm to people who agree with me, no matter who they are. It is much more comforting, nevertheless, to be agreed with by someone who clearly knows more about the subject than I do.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy & Dr. Asimov:

I have just finished reading your June issue from cover to cover, and I was so impressed with its quality I ordered a subscription. I haven't so thoroughly enjoyed a science fiction magazine since I was a kid and savored every Gold-en *Galaxy*.

IAsfm gets better and better every year: more mature, more polished, more attractive. You might say that the changes in *IAsfm* recapitulate the development of the whole genre from its *Amazing* beginnings.

The Good Doctor's magazine looks great: the design of the interior pages is modern, uncluttered, and

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the haunting cover art by Barlowe is beautiful. More importantly, the stories succeed as science fiction and as literature because they are excellently written and truly induce a sense of wonder.

Mike Carr
Toledo, OH

I attribute the present high quality of the magazine to the mystic qualities of SH. As editor, we have, of course, the beauteous SHawna McCarthy. As associate editor, there is sweet SHeila Williams (who stays sweet by not smoking). It's an unbeatable combinaSHun.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna and Dr. A,

I have been a subscriber since almost the first issue and read the magazine cover to cover. Thanks for the excellent job and great stories. I hope that Barry and Somtow will be back again though, since I miss them.

On to the purpose of this letter. I have followed with interest the ongoing debate about mailing labels. I've just changed sides. I am now in favor of glued on labels although I'd still prefer mine to be on the back cover (I'm also a long time subscriber to the Science Fiction Book Club so if their ad were covered I wouldn't be upset). I recently had an occasion to travel to Dallas, Texas on Piedmont Airline and as I often do, I was reading my latest copy of *IAsfm*. However, I goofed and left it on the plane. Imagine my panic that my special bookshelf would have an empty slot. Well, Piedmont mailed the book back (it had a label on it—SEE) bless their hearts so the slot is no longer empty. The moral is that labels are not all bad and Piedmont is a great airline.

I would also like to touch on a subject I've had in mind for some time. I had the honor of meeting the good Doctor at a Lunacon (Forry Ackerman's suite) some years ago. I would like to see, if possible, a list of the Doctor's appearances, maybe Filthy Pierre could oblige in his calendar.

Best wishes and keep up the good work.

Robert E. Stewart

Had I been asked to point out possible advantages of a glued-on label, I would probably have been stuck for a reply other than: "Well, it's cheaper than putting each copy into a mailing envelope." Now, of course, that an advantage has been pointed out, I find it obvious. And a list of my appearances would be no thrill. I appear mostly in Manhattan and vicinity and how frustrating that would be for people in the rest of the country.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir and Madam:

While packing up a six-months' collection of SF to send to my youngest, I read "Blued Moon," by Connie Willis, for the fourth time. It's on my lap right now with a note in it admonishing him not to lose it.

So, late in the game though this may be, I want to congratulate you on having published it and her on having written it—but not in that order. I haven't seen this kind of writing fall together this well since

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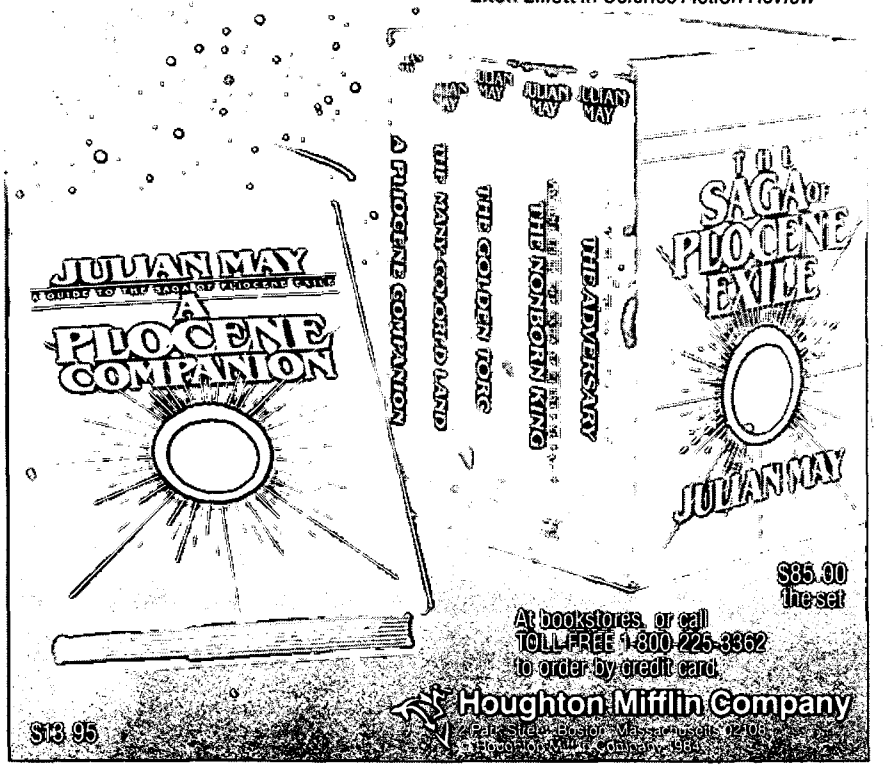

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I laughed my way through Thorne Smith, I won't say how many decades ago.

Alice Mailhot

I think that the best criterion of the excellence of any writing is its ability to withstand repeated rereading. And if you laughed your way through Thorne Smith, you have revealed yourself to be of my vintage—a little over thirty.

—Isaac Asimov

Cover letter of the year:

Dear Ms. McCarthy:
Had we but world enough, and time,
Coyness, editor, were no crime.
We'd correspond and think which way
To work this prose for greatest pay.
Thou in the volumes I'd provide
Should rubies find: I by your side
Should write them all again. I would
Echo, disturb, excite, allude
And you should instantly refuse
Each less than perfect, pick and choose.
My jungle-fecund plots should grow
Strong as empires, never slow;
An hundred years should go to mend
The paragraphs at start and end;
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Of dialogue and make it shine
With truth; an age to every part,
But only the last should move your heart.
Editor, you deserve this state,
Nor would I publish at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
The landlord's lawyers drawing near;
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But none, I think, from there subscribe.
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Have yet my story in review
And while my willing brow perspires
With inspiration's instant fires,
Now let us publish while we may,
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Rather at once print this, and mutter,
Than sing me at last, I in the gutter.
Let us roll what I wrote and all
You wish I'd written in one ball;
You, with pleasure won through strife,
Bring my characters to life,
I, though the landlord and his son
Come collecting, will make them run.
(with apologies to Andrew Marvell: To His Coy Mistress)

Sara Greenwald
New Haven, CT

And though, perhaps, you would like better,
We'll print, at least, your charming letter.

—Isaac Asimov

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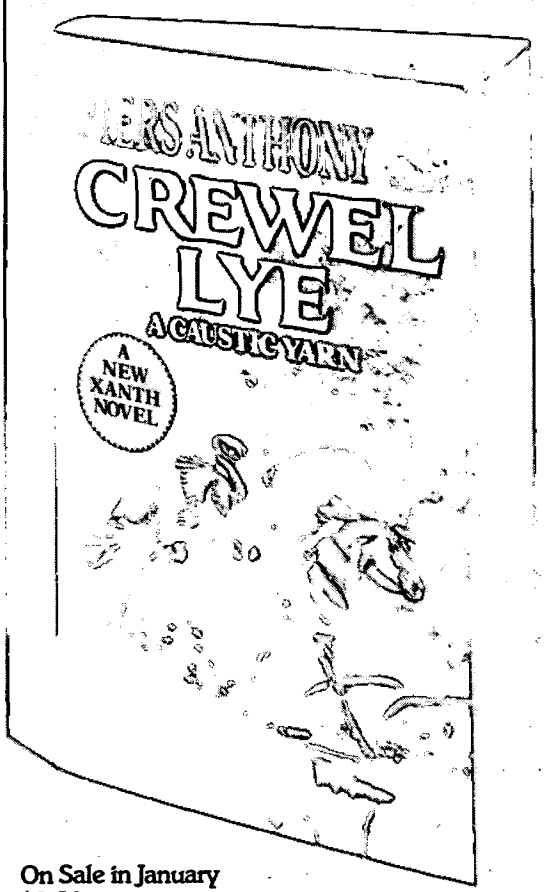

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Cover illustration by Darrell K. Sweet

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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

A murder has been committed on the planet Aurora. As the genius sleuth Elijah "Lije" Baley, you are the only person who can solve this crime. This is the premise of a new solitaire computer game based on Isaac Asimov's best-selling SF novel *Robots of Dawn* (available on disk for the Commodore 64 for $29.95 at your local software store, or direct from Epyx Inc., 1043 Kiel Court, Sunnyvale, CA 94089).

Robots of Dawn marks an important turning point in computer games. This past year, a number of new games were introduced based on famous works of science fiction and fantasy. These designs are supposed to be the wave of the future for computer games. There was some justifiable skepticism that these games would be big on hype and low on fun and intellectual challenge, but *Robots of Dawn* by Epyx proves to be a good text-adventure for amateur detectives and mystery-lovers.

Aurora, originally named New Earth, was settled by Earthpeople in the early days of interstellar travel. Only 5.7 light years from Earth, Aurora was the first extrasolar planet to be colonized. Aurora's sun is called "Tau Ceti" and emits faintly orange rays of light. Over the years the planet has come to be known as the "World of the Dawn."

Most star travelers consider Aurora a "tame" planet since its atmosphere is generally calm and free of all bacteria and other infection-causing agents. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, avalanches, and blizzards occur infrequently. Thunderstorms are common and cause bright flames to streak across the sky, and this, plus other phenomena, inspired the inhabitants to name their new home after the Roman goddess of the dawn.

Eos, the largest city on Aurora, has a population of 20,000 humans and 100,000 robots. On average, there are about 50 robots for every one of the 200,000 humans on the planet. The robots' duties include mining, factory work, domestic service, and protection of the citizens of Aurora. Three Laws of Robotics govern their behavior:

1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm;

2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders conflict with the first law;

3) A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second law.

Dr. Han Fastolfe, the inventor of the positronic humaniform robot ("artificial human"), is the murder victim. Fastolfe was an outspoken

(continued on page 193)

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"With its mythical creatures, its vast array of arresting characters, and its threat of destruction to Midkemia, Feist's tale invites comparison to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" *(Best Sellers)*.

Look for *Silverthorn*, the second volume of Raymond Feist's "Riftwar Trilogy," to be published in early 1985 by Doubleday.

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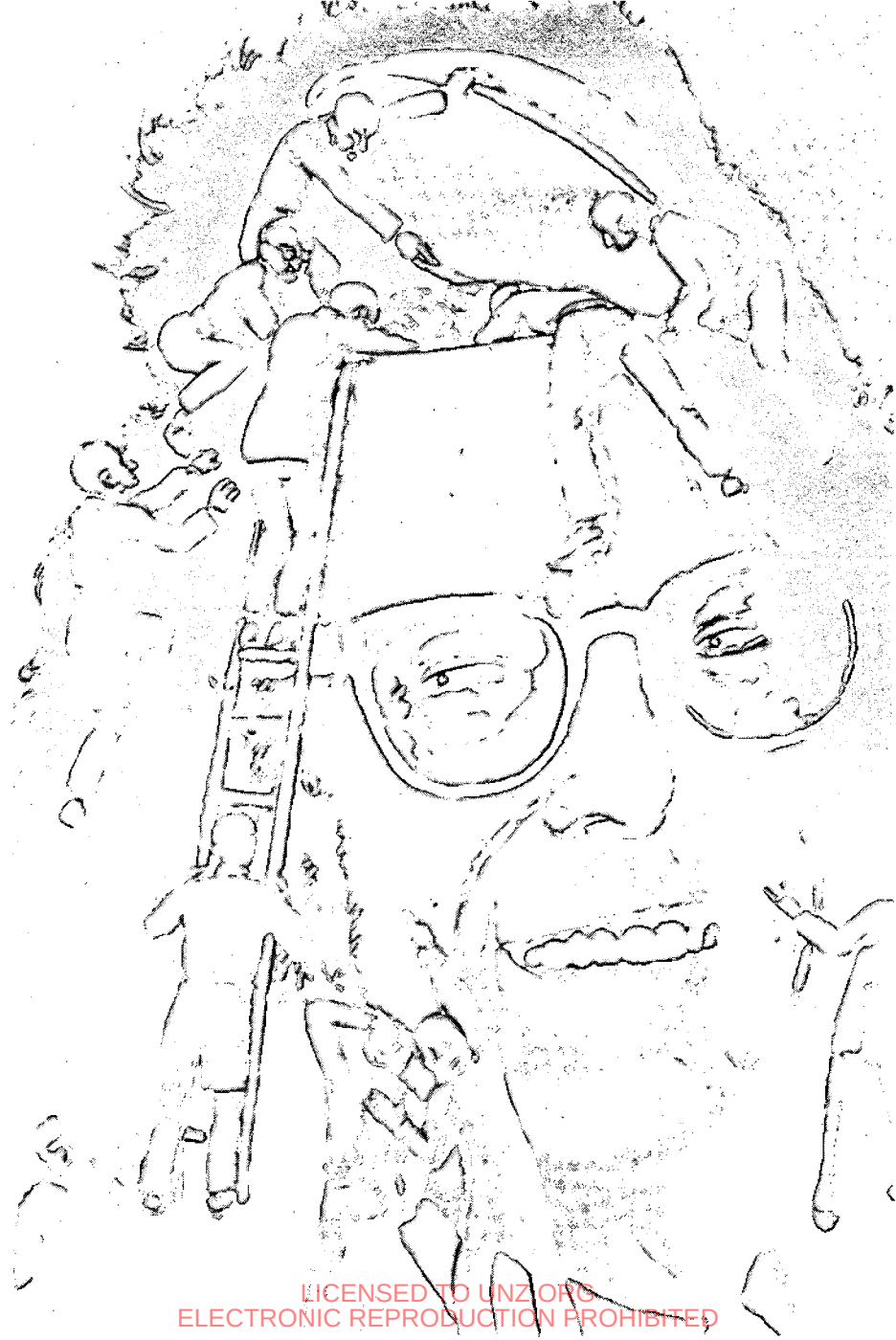

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VIEWPOINT

SUPERINTELLIGENCE!

by Tom Rainbow

art: Hank Jankus

The following article is the first of four Viewpoints we had in our inventory at the time of Tom Rainbow's death. It is as insightful and humorous as all of his work and we are pleased to be able to present it. "Superintelligence!" is followed by a sensitive article written for Tom by his good friend and colleague, Tony Rothman.

Tell me, are you often mistaken for a decorative planter or a toothpick dispenser? Are some people surprised to learn that you have opposable thumbs and use tools? When you ask your friends to fix you up with someone "compatible," do you usually find yourself going to the movies with a squirrel monkey or a ring-tailed lemur? When you visit the home of a stranger, does your host put newspapers on the floor, and follow you around with a trowel? If an attractive sentient suggested "going to bed," would you reply "No thanks! I'm not tired."

Well, then, you're *stupid.* Dumb. Moronic. Be careful that someone doesn't inadvertently stuff a mattress with you. Also, this magazine is not *edible,* so don't waste your time. Nor is it likely to be your mate.

Given that some of us have all the brains of a calzone, what, if anything, can be done about this? Why, become *smarter,* of course! Science fiction is replete with stories about humans increasing their intelligence. Poul Anderson's novel *Brain Wave* describes what everyday life would be like if human intelligence were suddenly tripled. Larry Niven has his

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VIEWPOINT

"Protector" characters, human-beings who become super-smart monsters after infection with an alien virus. The DC comic book *The Legion of Super-Heroes* has a character named Brainiac 5, whose super-power is his "12th-level effector" super-mind.

I always felt sorry for Brainiac 5. As super-powers go, superintelligence seemed relatively ineffectual. I always wanted the ability to make things super-heavy, for instance. Now I know better! You can get *sued* for making people super-heavy. You can get *rich* by having a super-mind. Such conventional geniuses as Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan are deservedly wealthy from their talents. If you had a *super*-mind, that, relatively speaking, made old Carl look like a squirrel monkey, why you would be wallowing in your Money Bin amidst the bucks from your FTL drive and immortality serum patents. *Billions and Billions*, to coin a phrase.

Yes, Gentle But Abysmally Stupid Readers, superintelligence is possible. Given the normal advance of science, we will soon learn enough about the workings of the mammalian brain to be able to drastically increase our intelligence. Isn't science wonderful? After this, you'll only be mistaken for a Pepperoni Pizza because of your *complexion!*

Intelligence and the Brain

Why is it that some of us are smarter than squirrel monkeys? Well, maybe, it's merely because we do better on standardized tests. More likely, however, it results from having more *neurons*. Neurons, to review, are the predominant type of cell in the brain. Your typical science-fiction reader will have 200,000 neurons per gram of body weight, twice as many neurons per gram as your typical squirrel monkey *(Saimiri Sciureus)*. (See "Sentience and The Single Extraterrestrial in the Feb. 84 *IAsfm* for more detail on neuron to body weight ratios as an index of intelligence). In addition, your neurons are probably arranged in more complicated circuits than are the neurons in the brain of a squirrel monkey. The more complicated the brain, the more it can comprehend the complexities of its environment. The more it can anticipate its environment, the more it can exploit or control it. The ability to control your environment is an adequate operational definition of intelligence.

Do differences in human intelligence result from

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differences in neuronal number or wiring? No one really knows, though this seems like a plausible explanation. You would think that us neuroscientists would have an answer to such an obvious question. Part of the problem is that human intelligence is very heterogeneous. When we say that Isaac Asimov is a genius, how can we translate that observation into a hypothesis about which areas of his brain might be significantly more complicated than our own?

Let us say that Isaac Asimov is a genius at writing science-fiction and science-fact. A prediction of our hypothesis is that the brain areas that control science-fiction and science-fact writing would be significantly larger or more complicated in Dr. Asimov's brain than, say, in my brain. Well, what the heck brain areas would these be? It's very unlikely that natural selection has endowed the human brain with a unique area or circuit for science-fiction writing, in the same way that we have a specialized region for language production. Most probably, the science-fiction circuit would be a function of several brain regions that evolved to do very different things. Until we identify this circuit, we really can't test our hypothesis. Since we are only just beginning to describe circuits for cognitive functions in the human brain, it is likely to be a large number of years before we know enough about the science-fiction circuit to want to count Isaac Asimov's neurons.

But, you ask, even if we haven't mapped the science-fiction circuit, shouldn't *some* part of Isaac Asimov's brain be larger or more complicated than mine, given that he is a genius? Let's say we counted every neuron in every square centimeter of my brain, and mapped all of my neuronal connections. We do this for several other mundane-type people as well. We then do the same for Dr. A's brain, and compare the results. One result might be that there is clearly one patch of Isaac Asimov's brain that is significantly larger or more complicated than our own. This we infer to be the science-fiction circuit. More likely, however, we would see a hodge-podge of differences between his brain and ours, with some parts having more neurons, and some parts having less. The reason for this would be that not every area of the human brain is devoted to intelligence, and even for those

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areas dedicated to intelligence, it is unlikely that even a genius the calibre of Isaac Asimov would excel in *all* facets of the human intellect. In fact, he might even be *bad* at some things. Maybe he has fewer neurons in the brain circuits that play video games. Furthermore, to be a genius at some cognitive function, you may have to be sort of dumb at something else. Maybe, Asimov's brain has usurped those neurons important for playing video games, and has applied them towards science-fiction writing. Thus, his total number of neurons may not differ from ours. Unless we know which brain circuits mediate The Good Doctor's genius, it would be difficult to interpret the significance of any difference in neuronal number or organization between his brain and ours.

Increasing Intelligence

Let us make the reasonable assumption that differences in human intelligence do indeed result from differences in brain organization or neuronal number. It follows, then, that if we endow you with the neuronal organization of Isaac Asimov, you would then have the genius of Asimov, able to write best-selling books in a single bound, more powerful than an entire literary syndicate, and dedicated to Truth, Justice, and the Joys of Minor Lechery. Further, if we knew the neuronal mechanisms for intelligence, it stands to reason that we could improve on them by adding extra neurons to the circuit, or by making existing neurons more efficient. This would make you into a *super-genuis,* capable of building Time-Machines, Super-Power Suits, Shrinking Rays, De-evolution Rays, and all those other *fun* things they use in science-fiction. A De-evolution ray is just the thing to shine on your favorite editor when he or she rejects your science-fiction story. "What's that *australopithecus* doing in Ms. McCarthy's office?!"

One problem with enlarging the intelligence circuit is that neurons don't proliferate in an adult brain. Essentially, no new neurons are produced in a human brain, after, say, age two. You do not replace neurons lost by injury or aging. Nor do you repair severed connections between brain areas. This explains the nasty, enduring consequences of head or spinal cord injury. Teleologically speaking, it is not clear why neurons don't regenerate. Maybe it's because such things as memory and learning result from long-term alterations in neuronal structure.

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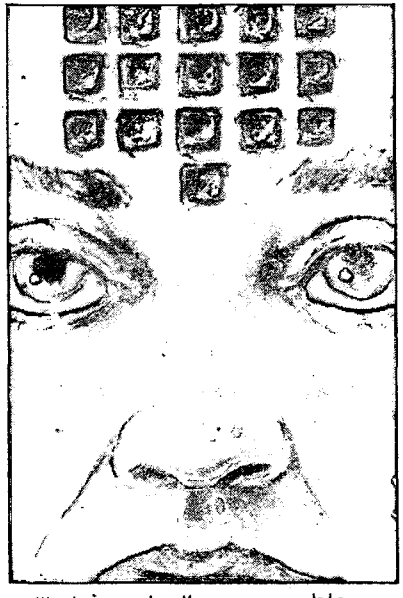

"Let us make the reasonable assumption that differences in human intelligence result from differences in brain organization or neuronal number. It follows, then, that if we endow you with the neuronal organization of Isaac Asimov, then you would have the genius of Asimov, able to write best-selling books in a single bound, more powerful than an entire literary syndicate, and dedicated to Truth, Justice, and the Joys of Minor Lechery."

If such structural alterations were not retained, and neurons could divide to produce additional cells, your memories might be lost. Prenatally, however, before you've learned anything, your neurons divide like crazy. If we could reproduce these same cellular conditions in an adult brain, and avoid any related problems such as amnesia, we might be able to add new neurons to our intelligence circuits.

In addition to making neurons divide, there is also the problem of adding them to the right places. We would want to increase the number of neurons only in the brain circuits involved in intelligence, and avoid adding neurons to, say, those brain circuits controlling Minor Lechery. Again, this is a matter of understanding, and then duplicating, those embyronic conditions that caused these very specific circuits to form. This may be kind of tricky, but in theory, it should be possible. The secrets of developmental neurobiology are in hot pursuit in laboratories all over the world. Once we know the molecular language to make neurons grow into specific patterns, and we understand the circuit that mediates intelligence, new neurons can be added to make ourselves smarter.

We envision, then, that one

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strategy to increase our intelligence would be to swallow some sort of recombinant DNA pill that would re-program our intelligence circuit neurons to grow and divide, thus increasing the size of our cerebral cortex. This is similar to how humans are transformed into Nivenesque Protectors, or to the way that super-intelligence is bestowed in a myriad of science-fiction stories and comic books. How much bigger would our brain have to grow? If we blithely assume that intelligence is a linear function of brain volume, and that 30 percent of our cerebral cortex is devoted to higher intellectual functions, we would have to increase our brain size by a third to double our intellect. While this may be smart enough to write best-selling science-fiction novels, and 300-odd additional books *à la* Dr. Asimov, it's probably not smart enough to build an FTL drive or a De-evolvo ray. I make this assumption because Isaac Asimov has never reported to exceed the speed of light, nor to devolve a single, wretched editor. To build these neat toys, we would probably need to at least triple our intellect, thus increasing our brain size by two-thirds.

The problem here is that the increased metabolic demand of your larger brain might wither your body. The brain uses 20–30 percent of your body's metabolism. An increase in brain size by two-thirds would mean that your brain would now use 50 percent of your metabolism. Every other heartbeat, every second stomach contraction would go to feed your new brain. This might leave you too tired to build a decent De-evolvo ray. To circumvent this, we would have to increase the size of your internal organs by two-thirds, roughly doubling the size of your body. This would in turn necessitate an additional increase in the size of your brain, because you would need new neurons to control your larger body. More neurons means an additional metabolic demand, so you haven't gained anything.

There are several ways around this problem. One way might be to increase the efficiency of your body, so that you generate more energy without an increase in size. Larry Niven's Protectors are monsters with super-efficient cardiovascular systems. Another way would be to build some sort of exoskeleton strength-suit, so that your poor withered little body could function normally. Maybe we could also design neurons that used less oxygen and glucose, allowing bigger

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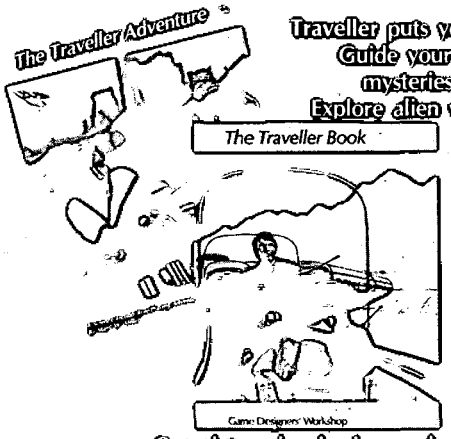

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brains without bigger bodies. Given that you're going to have roughly three times my intelligence, I am going to leave the particulars of all this to you. Yet another solution, however, would be to *devolve* several well-known science-fiction editors, and let them carry you on their hairy backs.

Asimov's Brain

Given that we currently lack the knowledge to add more neurons to our intelligence circuit, and may not obtain this information for quite some time, is there a more *immediate* way to make ourselves smarter?

Sure! We can *steal* intelligence. Let us imagine that you're a talented but largely unappreciated young neuroscientist, struggling for tenure at a hyper-competitive, major Ivy League University. You read an ad in the *Journal of Neuroscience:*

Are you a talented but largely unappreciated young neuroscientist, struggling for tenure at a hyper-competitive, major Ivy League University? Well, then, why don't you join the *KGB?* Earn Big Bucks as a spy for the Soviet System! Travel. Your own office. World Conquest. Fill out the coupon below.

You return the coupon, and in just ten days, you become a Soviet Super-Scientist in the employ of the KGB. Congratulations, Comrade! Your first assignment is to improve the quality of Soviet science fiction, so that valuable foreign currency can be generated from New York *Times* best-seller list sales, paperback and movie rights, plus licensing fees for toys, video-games and many other products, such as bathroom tissue. It is suggested that you use your neuroscience talents to make a loyal Soviet citizen into a science fiction genius the calibre of Isaac Asimov. Too hard, you say to your Soviet Masters, while sipping elegant, flavored vodkas and tasting fine caviars. You summarize for them an article you wrote for a decadent western science fiction magazine on the problems of increasing the number of neurons. You suggest that it might be easier to *steal* from the brain of the decadent capitalist, Asimov, the actual brain regions that he uses to write science fiction, and *transplant* them into the brain of a loyal Soviet.

Your plan is approved, for in addition, it will deprive the West of one its greatest writers of this genre. After using loyal Soviet "volunteers" to map the brain

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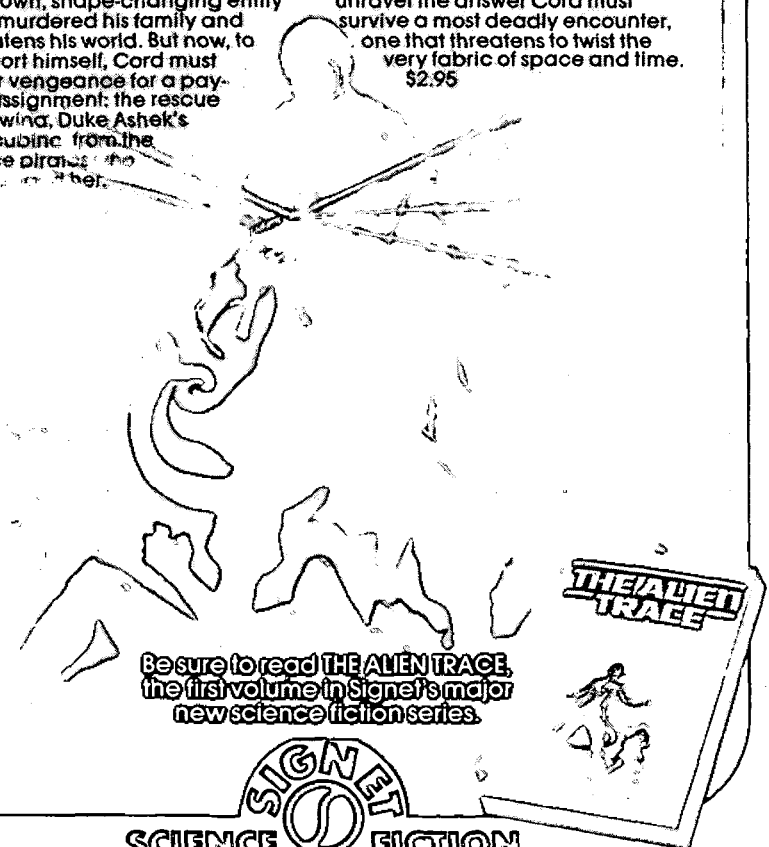

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circuits responsible for science fiction writing, you mount a crash program to develop a computerized interface that will allow the connection of Asimov's brain circuits to those of the Soviet writer, thus circumventing the need to make the severed axions of the brain transplant re-grow into the host brain. Finally, all is ready. Under the guise of a typical New York City mugging, the relevant circuits are carefully excised from Asimov's brain. They are placed in a hyper-oxygenated solution that mimics the normal chemical composition of the extra-cellular fluid of the brain, and transported via diplomatic pouch to your laboratory in Moscow. The same areas are removed from the brain of the Soviet writer, and using the computerized interface, replaced with Asimov's brain circuits. The transplant is viable in the new brain. The Soviet writer is given a special titanium typewriter, designed to withstand the stresses of his ferocious new literary output. *Nothing happens.* He's still this insipid Party hack! Somewhat chagrined, you realize that Asimov's brain circuits speak *English,* while the hack's brain only understands *Russian.* The host brain can't *communicate* with the transplant. It's like installing a microprocessor built for an IBM microcomputer into the circuit board of an Apple. You realize the solution! Remove the transplant and put it in a brain that speaks English! You rush into the office of your Soviet KGB masters with the good news, whereupon they promptly *kick* you to death with those neat-o poisoned switchblades hidden in the toes of their shoes. You die horribly.

An interesting scenario, and one that's inherently plausible. Once we have identified the brain circuits responsible for Isaac Asimov's genius, it stands to reason that if we could replace *your* circuits with *his* circuits, you would acquire his genius. This is analogous to replacing the current microprocessor in your home computer with a more powerful one. The only problem is again that because the severed neurons won't regenerate to form new connections, the brain circuits of the transplant won't be able to communicate with the neurons of the host brain. There is some evidence that damaged neurons will at least *attempt* to form new synaptic connections, so it may be somewhat easier to devise a way to facilitate this process than it would be to figure out how to make whole new neurons. Also, we might be able to develop some sort of bionic

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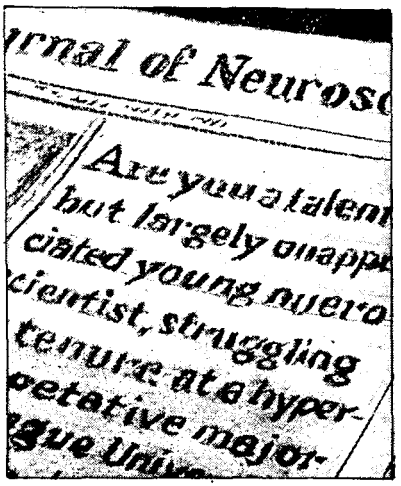
splicer that would act as a bridge between the severed axons of the host and transplant circuits. If I were really a Soviet Super-Scientist, and not my decadent, capitalistic self, I would think there was a lot of potential here.

Brain-circuit theft would only allow us to become as smart as the smartest human. To exceed this, as we have discussed, it is necessary to add additional neurons to our intelligence circuits. A way to do this *now* might be to supplement our cerebral cortices with prenatal brain tissue. Embryonic brain tissue, unlike tissue from an adult brain, tends to form new synaptic connections. There are examples where damage to the brain of an adult rat can be repaired by implanting brain tissue from a fetal rat. The fetal brain tissue appears to mature normally in the host brain, and replaces the functions of the damaged area. You could imagine that if we would transplant fetal intelligence circuit neurons into our intelligence circuits, we might *increase* the size of its circuitry, and thus make ourselves smarter. The problems inherent in maintaining a substantially larger brain could be solved by any of the means that we already discussed.

Where would we get fetal brain



"To become really smart, we need to connect our brains to a computer. There is no reason to think that we can't design a computer that would have a more complicated cellular architecture than a human brain, so that it would have more inherent intelligence. The only limit to the complexity of such a computer would be that the density of its components must be less than the critical value that would make it collapse into a black hole. This presumably would allow for a *fair* degree of complexity."

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tissue? Well, let's just say that the ability to obtain such interesting research materials is one advantage that your typical Soviet Super-Scientist has over us mundane American Assistant Professors. Before we get too ghoulish, however, it's important to realize that because we would already have an intelligence circuit in place, supplementing it with fetal tissue might do nothing at all. The example is not the same as replacing damaged adult brain circuits with functioning circuits from embryonic brain. On the other hand, it might work real well. It is likely that someone will do an experiment on rats or monkeys to test if the functions of an undamaged brain can be enhanced by the addition of fetal tissue. If it does, there will be a *big* demand for human fetal brain tissue. There is already the glimmerings of such a demand, as transplants of fetal brain tissue offer the promise of ameliorating currently incurable neurological diseases.

Brain-Computer Links

Although it might be kind of fun to do something constructive with your baby brother, like take out his brain and remove his neurons, there are real limits to how smart you can become with just neurons alone. Obtaining more than two or three times a normal human IQ with just neurons is like thinking you're going to break the sound barrier by running. To become really smart, we need to connect our brains to a computer. There is no reason to think that we can't design a computer that would have a more complicated cellular architecture than a human brain, so that it would have more inherent intelligence. The only limit to the complexity of such a computer would be that the density of its components must be less than the critical value that would make it collapse into a black hole. This presumably would allow for a *fair* degree of complexity. Computers are also faster than human brains. At its fastest, a neuron might exchange information with another neuron at 1000 bits per second. It has been estimated that the rate of information transfer within a computer could go as high as 10^{15} bits per second, before any conceivable substance would melt from the inherent entrophic heat of information exchange. This is a trillion times faster than the firing rate of a neuron.

You could imagine that a neural prosthesis would be implanted in your intelligence circuit to connect you with the

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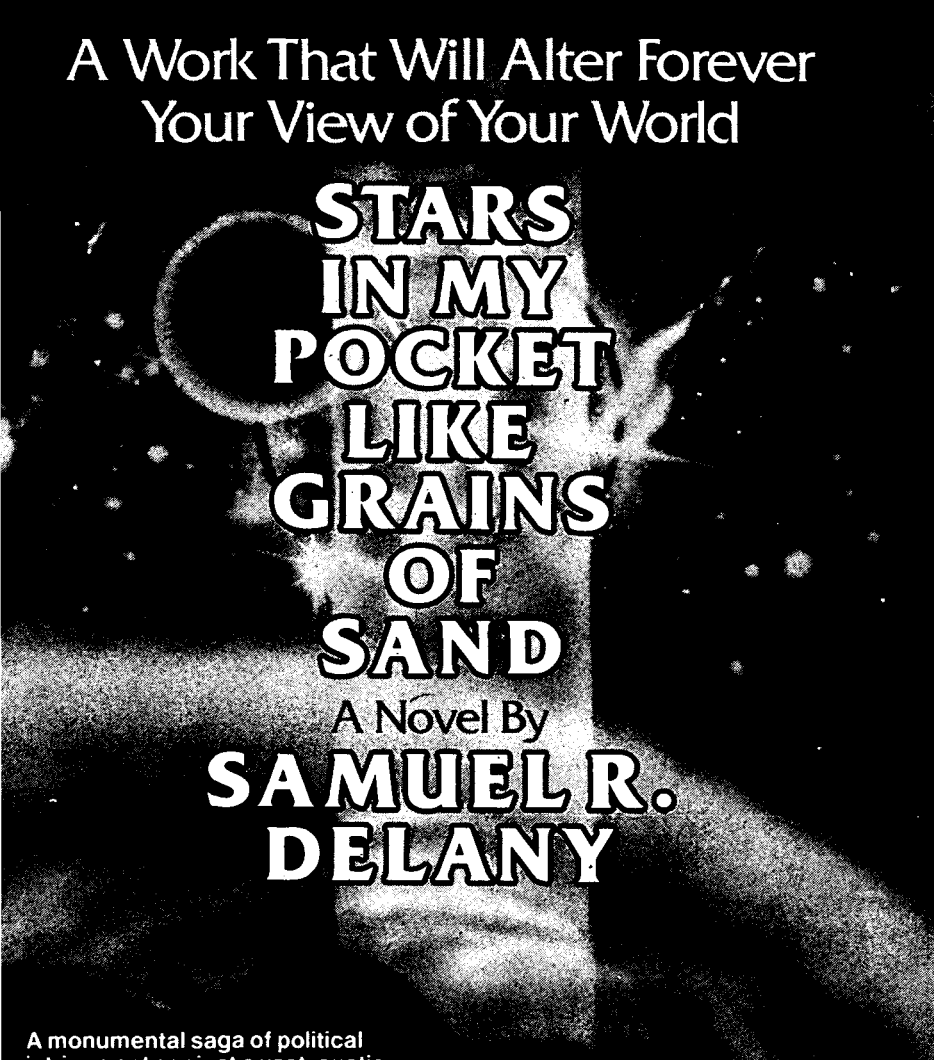

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"Are you a talented but largely unappreciated young neuroscientist, struggling for tenure at a hyper-competitive, major Ivy League University? Well, then, why don't you join the *KGB?* Earn Big Bucks as a spy for the Soviet System! Travel. Your own office. World Conquest. Fill out the coupon below."

superintelligence computer. The high rate of information transfer between you and the computer might occur via an infra-red laser signal, which in addition to having the ability to carry a large amount of information, could also penetrate your skull to communicate with your prosthesis. Don't turn it up too high, though! Alternatively, we could implant the *computer* directly in your brain. The trend in computer architecture is to make everything as small as possible to minimize the time delay imposed by the speed of light. The technology is already being developed to make molecule-sized computers out of DNA or similar polymer. DNA has the additional advantage of having the highest information density of any known material. Human DNA, which occupies a volume of 10^{-12} cubic centimeters, holds roughly 10^{10} bits of information, all of the instructions necessary to make a fertilized egg become an adult human being. The information content of a human brain may be roughly 10^{15} bits (See "The Feasibility of Mind-Transfer," June '83 *IAsfm*). Given this figure, then, a crystal of DNA the size of a sugar cube (1 cubic centimeter) could store as much information as 10 million human

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brains. A DNA crystal 1000 cubic centimeters in volume, the same size as a human brain, could contain the memories of 10 billion people, the sum total of all the experiences of all the human beings that ever lived or ever will live from the Pleistocene to 2000 A.D.

Gee, isn't technology wonderful? Now, imagine if your DNA-based prosthesis were connected via infra-red laser to a computer constructed from a kilometer-sized cube of DNA. A kilometer-sized cube of DNA could store the memories of 10^{25} human-equivalent sentient beings. This compares favorably to the number of sentient beings in the Universe. If we assume there are a billion galaxies in the observable Universe, and each galaxy has a million planets with sentient life, and each planet has 10 billion sentient beings, then there are 10^{25} sentient beings in the Universe. Give that most of the information in the Universe is stored in the brains of its sentients, a connection to a kilometer-sized DNA computer library would give you access to a majority of all the information in the Universe. In other words, you'd know almost as much as Isaac Asimov.

What would it be like to be this smart? According to Larry Niven, the superintelligence possessed by the Protector humans would approximate having prescience and clairvoyance. Even with their intelligence of perhaps only two or three times a genius-level human IQ, the Protector humans could extrapolate so clearly the likely outcomes of present events that they could essentially see the future. They could also interpolate from just a few facts the operations of very complicated machines, and then proceed to duplicate or improve on these machines. The ability to obtain information like this about the present from essentially nowhere would be very similar to having clairvoyance. One associates prescience and clairvoyance with not having to do any *thinking* to get information. It is not clear that things would just pop into your head if you had superintelligence. You may still have to think a problem through sequentially to solve it, but you'd be able to solve much more difficult problems. To build a De-Evolvo ray, for instance, you may have to first derive all the new physical laws necessary to construct such a device, figure out how to modify, say, an existing X-ray laser to project De-Evolvo beams, calculate the power-requirements and build a portable fusion

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VIEWPOINT

reactor, etc. Hard work? Sure. But it'll be worth it the first time you transform a well-known science fiction editor into a puddle of Primordial Slime!

The Protector humans merely had two or three times genius-level human IQ. If we connect our brains to a DNA-based supercomputer, our intelligence would be multiplied by some factor that would range from a trillion, which would be the increase in the rate of information transfer over a human brain, to 10^{26}, which would be the increase in your information storage capacity. At this level of superintelligence, you would essentially have the mind of God, with the ability to extrapolate or interpolate any event in the Universe, past, present or future. *Will* Loni Anderson marry Larry Hagman? *Will* Jackie O drop Ryan O'Neal for *G. Gordon Liddy?* God knows all these things, and more. It would even be better than cable TV!

Once a Pizza-Brain, Always a Pizza-Brain

You know, there are some people that, even though you'd go through all the trouble to interface them with a DNA-based supercomputer, and make them smarter than any sentient being in the known Universe, they'd *still* be dumb. Take a colleague of mine, a respected, well-known scientist, who tends to drool. Increase his IQ by 10^{26} fold, and the entire East Coast will be inundated in saliva. Take another well-regarded, extremely intelligent scientist. If he's so smart, why is it that all the women he dates tend to look like Isaac Asimov in a skirt? God knows what he'd bring to faculty parties if he were any smarter. A water buffalo, maybe. Take *me,* for instance. If I'm so goddamn smart, where's my patent for a Spiderman serum or a mind-transfer machine? Why aren't I *immortal,* hm? Why haven't I at least written an article for *Omni?* Maybe it's because I read too much science fiction and too many comic books. Give me an IQ of 10^{26}, and I'd probably build a time machine that could be used exclusively to obtain next month's comic books. Such puerile diversions are serious distractions from the conquest of the Universe. *Sigh!* As either Friedrich Nietzsche or Jerry Pournelle said, "The Will is All," implying strongly that the Mind is not. Maybe I can buy some comic books about Nietzsche! ●

References

For more about developmental

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neurobiology, try "The Development of Maps and Stripes in the Brain" by M. Constantine-Paton and M. I. Law, *Scientific American,* Dec. 1982. Specifics about fetal brain transplants can be found in "Brain-Grafting Work Shows Promise" by Gina Kolanta, *Science,* Sept. 23, 1983. Further reading on the future of computers can be had in "Information: The Ultimate Frontier" by Lewis Branscomb, *Science,* Jan. 12, 1979. You might also glance at "The Feasibility of Mind-Transfer" and "Sentience and the Single Extraterrestrial" in, respectively, the June 1983, and Feb. 1984 *IAsfm* for more background about how neurons can produce intelligence. Both little ditties are by me.

FOR TOM RAINBOW

by Tony Rothman

By now many of you will have learned that Tom Rainbow was fatally injured on September 6, 1984 while attempting to board a moving train. When the accident occurred Tom was thirty years of age. I have been asked to share a few thoughts with you.

This task is not easy, for words are among the most confining of prisons and their chains are never felt more keenly than when one struggles to find meaning in the senseless death of a close friend. But after further reflection, it becomes clear that we should not be searching for meaning in death, we should be searching for meaning in life. For me, I cannot help but remember words read long ago as a child in a forgotten book: "My death is only one event in my life and certainly not the most important." These words were attributed to Brahms shortly before he died. I like to think that Brahms said them, for they are among the most beautiful words I know and they are right; we will remember Tom as he lived, not as he died.

Readers of this magazine will know Tom as the author of a series of articles on subjects ranging from superpowers to mind-transfer to immortality. From these articles you would have judged Tom to be a very bright fellow, and you would not be wrong; he was among the brightest of a new breed of scientists called neuro-biologists and his field of expertise was the brain. He

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VIEWPOINT

charted the landscape of the brain and attempted to trace the path of electrical and chemical signals as they were transmitted through the complex network of neurons and synapses. Tom once told me that he became a biologist because he wanted to get to the bottom of things but wasn't good enough at math to do physics. Certainly there are many paths to the bottom of things and, eventually, the study of the brain will be linked to physics. This must be, and Tom knew it. In the meantime, the brain, the center of man, is as fundamental a territory as a biologist can find. Although he may have worked with chemicals and electrical signals, what Tom was really after were thoughts and emotions. He excelled in this exploration; by age thirty he had finished a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, had completed a post-doctoral fellowship of several years at Rockefeller University, had spent nearly two years as Assistant Professor at the Pharmacology Department at Penn, and was looked at as one of the rising stars of the field.

His readers cannot have failed to notice his trenchant humor either. As a frequent drinking companion I can accurately speak of Tom's less sober side. On many occasions he said to me, "Tony, you have aspirations to be a great author; *I* want to write great comic books." In his nonserious way, Tom was being very serious. Last year we traveled to Balticon together. Over my strenuous protestations, he insisted on spending two hundred and fifty dollars for a light saber and Jedi-Knight cape. I told him that for ten dollars worth of junk parts and a day at a lathe I could make one for him myself, but he would hear nothing of it. More recently he could be seen sporting an Indiana Jones fedora everywhere he went and, a few months ago, he asked me to find him a genuine Texas bullwhip to complete his collection.

You must remember, though, that his frivolous side was the play of a scientist and his interest in science fiction did reflect a deep interest in the future of man. At Balticon, Bob Silverberg was wondering aloud if he had made a mistake in devoting his entire life to science fiction and Tom said, "One of the reasons I

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became a scientist was because I read your books as a kid." I hope this made Bob happy. There is no question that for Tom science and science fiction were connected, though naturally, he tended to show more skepticism toward ideas in his own field than in others. Our debates showed this constantly. Tom was not technically a geneticist but he thought a lot about genes and believed our genetic heritage was everything. He would try to convince me that faster-than-light travel was possible, that Planck's constant could vary—but try to get around genetics—never. Less than a week before the accident, he set me to calculating the number of women living in the United States with whom I could fall in love. Our estimates differed by factors of ten or one hundred but Tom was nonetheless convinced that genetic matchmaking was the wave of the future.

When I look back at Tom's brief writing career, I feel slightly paternal. For many years he had wanted to write science fiction and the fact that I had broken into the market apparently spurred him on to try himself. When he discovered I knew Shawna McCarthy, there was no escape from introducing them. I am glad I did.

We had planned several writing projects together. He wanted to do a book on the science in science fiction; he would handle the biology and I the physics. I was worried that the market was already becoming flooded with such books and we put it off. I proposed an article on the biological side-effects of black holes; he said great. We didn't write it and I do not know why. I was planning a novel and wanted his help; he agreed. Now I will do it alone. A few months ago he suggested an article on how to create God. I liked this idea very much and we were soon to begin.

Some readers will be offended at such a sacrilegious proposition, an article on the creation of God. But I remind you again that Tom was a scientist and among the most rational scientists I knew. He believed that mind and brain were the same, that thoughts and emotions boiled down to electrical and chemical impulses and people to atoms and electrons. And he therefore believed that if God

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was to be had, science would create him. I will try to write that article for him.

Not everyone may agree with Tom's philosophy, but it is precisely this philosophy which gives his friends and family comfort now, for Tom also viewed death with that same rational, even bemused, detachment characteristic of many scientists, characteristic especially of biologists who are a little closer than the rest of us to knowing what life is about. At the memorial service for Tom, the minister read the words of Eustice Hayden written on the death of a physiologist. I cannot think of more appropriate words to be read now. "At a time like this we are often so blinded by loss that death wears too much mystery, yet it is no more than a return to our home in nature. Life is the real mystery, hidden from us because the veil of familiarity covers our eyes. That a fragment of the material of the earth should grow into forms of beauty, feel love and joy and sorrow, become a temple of ideas and dreams, send thought messages out to all the reaches of space and time, mold meanings and patterns of beauty into the lives of others, and gather the threads of friendship and devotion, admiration and loyalty, from hundreds of hearts, this is the marvelous mystery, the supreme poetic achievement of time and nature. Death restores the borrowed materials to the earth, but the time-sculptured personality and character it has no power to touch."

In a single instant Tom consigned his memory to our keeping. His friends share with his family and wife Marsha a great sense of loss, but at the same time feel privileged to have known such a man and understand that, indeed, the time-sculptured personality death has no power to touch. ●

Tony Rothman received his PhD from the Center of Relativity at the University of Texas, Austin in 1981. Since then he has done postdoctoral work at Oxford and Moscow. Dr. Rothman was also a close friend of Tom Rainbow's.

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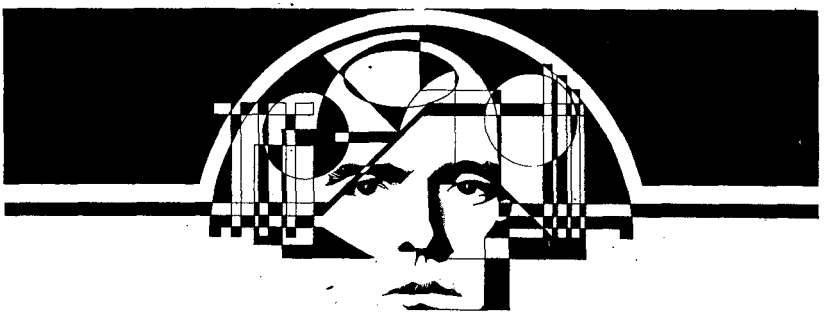
MARTIN GARDNER

SATAN AND THE APPLE



I had occasion recently to spend a few weeks in San Francisco. Early one afternoon, while I was finishing lunch at the Caffe Puccini in the North Beach section—it's a spot where some of my more eccentric Silicon Valley friends hang out—an attractive young woman with red hair came over to the booth where I was sitting alone.

"Are you Martin Gardner?" she asked.

"That's me," I replied, putting aside the newspaper I had been reading.

"May I sit down?"

"Of course."

A mutual friend, she said, had told her I would be there. She was a subscriber to *IAsfm*, and she read my puzzle column every month. There was a strange story she wanted to tell me. She was sure I could make use of it in my column.

"It all started three years ago," she said, "a few weeks after I got my Ph.D. in astrophysics at Stanford. My thesis was on the latest models of the inflationary universe—you know, the universe that starts with a big bang, then after a few microseconds it suddenly inflates, and . . ."

"You don't have to explain," I interrupted. "I know about the models."

"Well," she continued, "I was sitting at the console of my Apple computer one night—it was late, about three in the morning—when I started to doze. I let my fingers wander idly over the keys . . ."

"Were you weary and ill at ease?" I asked. "Like the lady at the organ when she found that lost chord?"

"Exactly," she said. "That's how it was. I can't remember what I was thinking or dreaming about, but suddenly there was a loud explosion.

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The room filled with smoke. It smelled terrible. When the smoke cleared, there was Satan leering at me."

I couldn't help grinning. "What did the old fellow look like?"

"Just like his pictures," she said. "He was tall and handsome, wearing red tights, and he had a black mustache and pointed beard. There were two little horns on his head, and a long forked tail at his rear. He told me my fingers had hit on an old cabalistic combination of numbers and letters that forced him to appear. He offered me anything I desired."

"Of course you refused."

"No," she said. "I was too anxious to learn how the cosmos began. My thesis analyzed all the latest big bang models, but naturally I didn't know which was true. Maybe they were all false. I wanted to know what really happened back there in time some fifteen or twenty billion years ago."

"Did he tell you?"

"He did. And I must say his answer floored me. Maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised. After all, if it wasn't for the Bible we wouldn't know Satan existed. Right?"

"Right," I said. "What the devil did he tell you?"

"He told me the universe was formed just like it says in Genesis. Jehovah created everything out of nothing in six days, each twenty-four hours long. Then he rested on the seventh."

"If that's the case," said I, "the universe must be only six to ten thousand years old. What about the stars so far away that the light we see from them must have started millions of years ago?"

"I asked Satan about that," she said. "He told me the universe was created with all that light already on the way."

"And the fossils?"

"They're the records of plants and animals that were wiped out by Noah's flood."

"Are you trying to tell me," I said, "that the fundamentalists are right? That evolution is a false theory, and everything happened in six literal days just the way the Old Testament has it?"

"Yes," she said sadly. "That's what I learned from Satan. And he ought to know. He was there when it happened."

I studied her face carefully. It was a pretty face, with intelligent, unshifty eyes that looked directly into mine and betrayed not the slightest trace of insincerity. A sudden thought popped into my head.

"Satan," I said, "has a reputation of never giving anything away free. There's always a bargain. You must have offered him something. What did you give in exchange for this information?"

She smiled faintly, looked nervously around the room, then bent over and whispered. "I gave up the ability of ever telling the truth when I meet someone for the first time."

See page 142 for some commentary.

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by Lucius Shepard

THE END OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

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Lucius Shepard's short story, "Solatario's Eyes," has been nominated for The World Fantasy Award, and his novel, *Green Eyes*, is currently out as a new Ace Special. This is his fourth appearance in these pages, and we expect to be seeing a lot more from him in the future.

Art: J.K. Potter

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What Lisa hated most about Mexico were the flies, and Richard said Yeah, the flies were bad, but it was the lousy attitude of the people that did him in, you know, the way the waiters ignored you and the taxi drivers sneered, the sour expressions of desk clerks—as if they were doing you a big favor by letting you stay in their fleabag hotels. All that. Lisa replied that she couldn't blame the people, because they were probably irritated by the flies; this set Richard to laughing, and though Lisa had not meant it to be funny, after a moment she joined in. They needed laughter. They had come to Mexico to Save Their Marriage, and things were not going well . . . except in bed, where things had always gone well. Lisa had never been less than ardent with Richard, even during her affair.

They were an attractive couple in their thirties, the sort to whom a healthy sex life seems an essential of style, a trendy accessory to pleasure like a Jacuzzi or a French food processor. She was a tall, fey-looking brunette with fair skin, an aerobically nurtured slimness, and a face that managed to express both sensuality and intelligence ("hooker eyes and Vassar bones," Richard had told her); he was lean from handball and weights, with an executive touch of gray in his black hair and the bland, firm-jawed handsomeness of a youthful anchorman. Once they had held to the illusion that they kept fit and beautiful for one another, but all their illusions had been tarnished and they no longer understood their reasons for maintaining them.

For a while they made a game of hating Mexico, pretending it was a new bond between them, striving to outdo each other in pointing out instances of filth and native insensitivity; finally they realized that what they hated most about the country were their own perceptions of it, and they headed south to Guatemala where—they had been informed—the atmosphere was conducive to romance. They were leery about the reports of guerrilla activity, but their informant had assured them that the dangers were overstated. He was a seasoned traveler, an elderly Englishman who had spent his last twelve winters in Central America; Richard thought he was colorful, a Graham Greene character, whereas Lisa described him in her journal as "a deracinated old fag."

"You mustn't miss Lake Atitlán," he'd told them. "It's absolutely breath-taking. Revolution there is an aesthetic impossibility."

Before boarding the plane Richard bought the latest Miami Herald, and he entertained himself during the flight by bemoaning the decline of Western civilization. It was his conviction that the United States was becoming part of the Third World and that their grandchildren would inhabit a mildly poisoned earth and endure lives of back-breaking drudgery under an increasingly Orwellian government. Though this conviction was hardly startling, it being evident from the newspaper that such a world was close upon them, Lisa accorded his viewpoint the status of wisdom; in fact, she had relegated wisdom in general to be his preserve, staking claim herself to the traditional feminine precincts of soulfulness

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and caring. Sometimes back in Connecticut, while teaching her art class at the Y or manning the telephones for PBS or Greenpeace or whatever cause had enlisted her soulfulness, looking around at the other women, all—like her—expensively kept and hopeless and with an eye cocked for the least glimmer of excitement, then she would see how marriage had decreased her wattage; and yet, though she had fallen in love with another man, she had clung to the marriage for almost a year thereafter, unable to escape the fear that this was the best she could hope for, that no matter what steps she took to change her situation, her life would always be ruled by a canon of mediocrity. That she had recently stopped clinging did not signal a slackening of fear, only that her fingers were slipping, her energy no longer sufficient to maintain a good grip.

As the plane came down into Guatemala City, passing over rumpled green hills dotted with shacks whose colors looked deceptively bright and cheerful from a height, Richard began talking about his various investments, saying he was glad he'd bought this and that, because things were getting worse every day. "The shitstorm's a 'comin', babe," he said, patting her knee. "But we're gonna be awright." It annoyed Lisa no end that whenever he was feeling particularly accomplished his language became countrified, and she only shrugged in response.

After clearing customs they rented a car and drove to Panajachel, a village on the shores of Lake Atitlán. There was a fancy hotel on the shore, but in the spirit of "roughing it" Richard insisted they stay at a cheaper place on the edge of town—an old green stucco building with red trim and an arched entranceway and a courtyard choked with ferns; it catered to what he called "the bleeding-ear set," a reference to the loud rock 'n' roll that blasted from the windows. The other guests were mostly college-age vacationers, a mixture of French and Scandanavians and Americans, and as soon as they had unpacked, Lisa changed into jeans and a work shirt so she would fit in among them. They ate dinner in the hotel dining room, which was cramped and furnished with red wooden tables and chairs and had the menu painted on the wall in English and Spanish. Richard appeared to be enjoying himself; he was relaxed, and his speech was peppered with slang that he hadn't used in almost a decade. Lisa liked listening to the glib chatter around them, talk of dope and how the people treat you in Huehuetenango and watch out if you're goin' to Bogota, man, 'cause they got packs of street kids will pick you clean. . . ." These conversations reminded her of the world in which she had traveled at Vassar before Richard had snatched her up during her junior year. He had been just back from Vietnam, a medic, full of anguish at the horrors he had seen, yet strong for having seen them; he had seemed to her a source of strength, a shining knight, a rescuer. After the wedding, though, she had not been able to recall why she had wanted to be rescued; she thought now that she had derived some cheap thrill from his aura of recent violence and had applied it to herself out of a romantic need to feel imperiled.

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They lingered over dinner, watching the younger guests drift off into the evening and being watched themselves—at least in Lisa's case—by a fortyish Guatemalan man with a pencil-line mustache, a dark suit, and patent-leather hair. He stared at her as he chewed, ducking his eyes each time he speared a fresh bite, then resuming his stare. Ordinarily Lisa would have been irritated, but she found the man's conspicuous anonymity appealing and she adopted a flirtacious air, laughing too loudly and fluttering her hands, in hopes that she was frustrating him.

"His name's Raoul," said Richard. "He's a white slaver in the employ of the Generalissimo, and he's been commissioned to bring in a new *gringa* for the harem."

"He's somebody's uncle," said Lisa. "Here to settle a family dispute. He's married to a dumpy Indian woman, has seven kids, and he's wearing his only suit to impress the Americans."

"God, you're a romantic!" Richard sipped his coffee, made a face and set it down.

Lisa bit back a sarcastic reply. "I think he's very romantic. Let's say he's staring at me because he wants me. If that's true, right now he's probably thinking how to do you in, or maybe wondering if he could trade you his truck, his means of livelihood, for a night with me. That's real romance. Passionate stupidity and bloody consequences."

"I guess," said Richard, unhappy with the definition; he took another sip of coffee and changed the subject.

At sunset they walked down to the lake. The village was charming enough—the streets cobbled, the houses whitewashed and roofed with tile; but the rows of tourist shops and the American voices acted to dispel the charm. The lake, however, was beautiful. Ringed by three volcanoes, bordered by palms, Indians poling canoes toward scatters of light on the far shore. The water was lacquered with vivid crimson and yellow reflection, and silhouetted against an equally vivid sky, the palms and volcanic cones gave the place the look of a prehistoric landscape. As they stood at the end of a wooden pier, Richard drew her into a kiss and she felt again the explosive dizziness of their first kisses; yet she knew it was a sham, a false magic born of geography and their own contrivance. They could keep traveling, keep filling their days with exotic sights, lacquering their lives with reflection, but when they stopped they would discover that they had merely been preserving the forms of the marriage. There was no remedy for their dissolution.

Roosters crowing waked her to gray dawn light. She remembered a dream about a faceless lover, and she stretched and rolled onto her side. Richard was sitting at the window, wearing jeans and a T-shirt; he glanced at her, then turned his gaze to the window, to the sight of a pale green volcano wreathed in mist. "It's not working," he said, and when she failed to respond, still half-asleep, he buried his face in his hands, muffling his voice. "I can't make it without you, babe."

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She had dreaded this moment, but there was no reason to put it off. "That's the problem," she said. "You used to be able to." She plumped the pillows and leaned back against them.

He looked up, baffled. "What do you mean?"

"Why should *I* have to explain it? You know it as well as I do. We weaken each other, we exhaust each other, we depress each other." She lowered her eyes, not wanting to see his face. "Maybe it's not even us. Sometimes I think marriage is this big pasty spell of cakes and veils that shrivels everything it touches."

"Lisa, you know there isn't anything I wouldn't. . ."

"What? What'll you do?" Angrily, she wadded the sheet. "I don't understand how we've managed to hurt each other so much. If I did I'd try to fix it. But there's nothing left to do. Not together, anyway."

He let out a long sigh—the sigh of a man who has just finished defusing a bomb and can allow himself to breathe again: "It's him, right? You still want to be with him."

It angered her that he would never say the name, as if the name were what counted. "No," she said stiffly. "It's not *him*."

"But you still love him."

"That's not the point! I still love you, but love. . ." She drew up her legs and rested her forehead on her knees. "Christ, Richard. I don't know what more to tell you. I've said it all a hundred times."

"Maybe," he said softly, "maybe this discussion is premature."

"Oh, Richard!"

"No, really. Let's go on with the trip."

"Where next? The Mountains of the Moon? Brazil? It won't change anything."

"You can't be sure of that!" He came toward the bed, his face knitted into lines of despair. "We'll just stay a few more days. We'll visit the villages on the other side of the lake, where they do the weaving."

"Why, Richard? God, I don't even understand why you still want me . . ."

"Please, Lisa. Please. After eleven years you can try for a few more days."

"All right," she said, weary of hurting him. "A few days."

"And you'll try?"

I've always tried, she wanted to say; but then, wondering if it were true, as true as it should be, she merely said. "Yes."

The motor launch that ran back and forth across the lake between Panajachel and San Augustín had seating room for fifteen, and nine of those places were occupied by Germans, apparently members of a family—kids, two sets of parents, and a pair of portly, red-cheeked grandparents. They reeked of crudity and good health, and made Lisa feel refined by comparison. The young men snapped their wives' bra straps—grandpa almost choked with laughter each time this happened;

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the kids whined; the women were heavy and hairy-legged. They spent the entire trip taking pictures of one another. They must have understood English, because when Richard cracked a joke about them they frowned and whispered and became standoffish. Lisa and Richard moved to the stern, a superficial union imposed, and watched the shore glide past. Though it was still early, the sun reflected a dynamited white glare on the water; in the daylight the volcanoes looked depressingly real, their slopes covered by patchy grass and scrub and stunted palms.

San Augustín was situated at the base of the largest volcano, and was probably like what Panajachel had been before tourism. Weeds grew between the cobblestones, the whitewash was flaked away in places, and grimy, naked toddlers sat in the doorways, chewing sugar cane and drooling. Inside the houses it was the Fourteenth Century. Packed dirt floors, iron cauldrons suspended over fires, chickens pecking and pigs asleep. Gnomish old Indian women worked at hand looms, turning out strange tapestries—as for example a design of black cranelike birds against a backdrop of purple sky and green trees, the image repeated over and over—and bolts of dress material, fabric that on first impression seemed to be of a hundred colors, all in perfect harmony. Lisa wanted to be sad for the women, to sympathize with their poverty and particular female plight, and to some extent she managed it; but the women were uncomplaining and appeared reasonably content and their weaving was better work than she had ever done, even when she had been serious about art. She bought several yards of the material, tried to strike up a conversation with one of the women, who spoke neither English or Spanish, and then they returned to the dock, to the village's only bar-restaurant—a place right out of a spaghetti western, with a hitching rail in front and skinned sapling trunks propping up the porch roof and a handful of young, long-haired American men standing along the bar, having an early-morning beer. "Holy marijuana!" said Richard, winking. "Hippies! I wondered where they'd gone." They took a table by the rear window so they could see the slopes of the volcano. The scarred varnish of the table was dazzled by sunlight; flies buzzed against the heated panes.

"So what do you think?" Richard squinted against the glare.

"I thought we were going to give it a few days," she said testily.

"Jesus, Lisa! I meant what do you think about the weaving." He adopted a pained expression.

"I'm sorry." She touched his hand, and he shook his head ruefully. "It's beautiful . . . I mean the weaving's beautiful. Oh God, Richard. I don't intend to be so awkward."

"Forget it." He stared out the window, deadpan, as if he were giving serious consideration to climbing the volcano, sizing up the problems involved. "What did you think of it?"

"It was beautiful," she said flatly. The buzzing of the flies intensified, and she had the notion that they were telling her to try harder. "I know it's corny to say, but watching her work . . . What was her name?"

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"Expectación."

"Oh, right. Well, watching her I got the feeling I was watching something magical, something that went on and on . . ." She trailed off, feeling foolish at having to legitimize with conversation what had been a momentary whimsy; but she could think of nothing else to say. "Something that went on forever," she continued. "With different hands, of course, but always that something the same. And the weavers, while they had their own lives and problems, that was less important than what they were doing. You know, like the generations of weavers were weaving something through time as well as space. A long, woven magic." She laughed, embarrassed.

"It's not corny. I know what you're talking about." He pushed back his chair and grinned. "How about I get us a couple of beers?"

"Okay," she said brightly, and smiled until his back was turned. He thought he had her now. That was his plan—to get her a little drunk, not drunk enough for a mid-day hangover, just enough to get her happy and energized, and then that afternoon they'd go for a ride to the next village, the next exotic attraction, and more drinks and dinner and a new hotel. He'd keep her whirling, an endless date, an infinitely prolonged seduction. She pictured the two of them as a pair of silhouetted dancers tangoing across the borders of map-colored countries. Whirling and whirling, and the thing was, the very sad thing was, that sooner or later, if he kept her whirling, she would lose her own momentum and be sucked into the spin, into that loving-the-spin-I'm-in-old-black-magic routine. Then final rinse. Final spin. Then the machine would stop and she'd be plastered to the side of the marriage like a wet blouse, needing a hand to lift her out. She should do what had to be done right now. Right this moment. Cause a scene, hit him. Whatever it took. Because if she didn't . . . He *thunked* down a bottle of beer in front of her, and her smile twitched by reflex into place.

"Thanks," she said.

"Por nada." He delivered a gallant bow and sat down. "Listen . . ."

There was a clatter from outside, and through the door she saw a skinny, bearded man tying a donkey to the hitching rail. He strode on in, dusting off his jeans cowboy-style, and ordered a beer. Richard turned to look and chuckled. The man was worth a chuckle. He might have been the Spirit of the Sixties, the Wild Hippie King. His hair was a ratty brown thatch hanging to his shoulders, and braided into it were long gray feathers that dangled still lower; his jeans were festooned with painted symbols, and there were streaks of what appeared to be green dye in his thicket of a beard. He noticed them staring, waved, and came toward them.

"Mind if I join you folks?" Before they could answer, he dropped into a chair. "I'm Dowdy. Believe it or not, that's a name, not a self-description." He smiled, and his blue eyes crinkled up. His features were sharp, thin to the point of being wizened. It was hard to tell his age because of

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the beard, but Lisa figured him for around thirty-five. Her first reaction had been to ask him to leave; the instant he had started talking, though, she had sensed a cheerful kind of sanity about him that intrigued her. "I live up yonder," he went on, gesturing at the volcano. "Been there goin' on four years."

"Inside the volcano?" Lisa meant it for a joke.

"Yep! Got me a little shack back in under the lip. Hot in the summer, freezin' in the winter, and none of the comforts of home. I got to bust my tail on Secretariat there"—he waved at the donkey—"just to haul water and supplies." In waving he must have caught a whiff of his underarm—he gave it an ostentatious sniff. "*And* to get me a bath. Hope I ain't too ripe for you folks." He chugged down a third of his beer. "So! How you like Guatemala?"

"Fine," said Richard. "Why do you live in a volcano?"

"Kinda peculiar, ain't it," said Dowdy by way of response; he turned to Lisa. "And how you like it here?"

"We haven't seen much," she said. "Just the lake."

"Oh yeah? Well, it ain't so bad 'round here. They keep it nice for the tourists. But the rest of the country . . . whooeee! Violent?" Dowdy made a show of awed disbelief. "You got your death squads, your guerrillas, your secret police, not to mention your basic crazed killers. Hell, they even got a political party called the Party of Organized Violence. Bad dudes. They like to twist people's arms off. It ain't that they're evil, though. It's just the land's so full of blood and brimstone and Mayan weirdness, it fumes up and freaks 'em out. That's how come we got volcanoes. Safety valves to blow off the excess poison. But things are on the improve."

"Really?" said Richard, amused.

"Yes indeed!" Dowdy tipped back in his chair, propping the beer bottle on his stomach; he had a little pot belly like that of a cartoon elf. "The whole world's changing. I s'pose y'all have noticed the way things are goin' to hell back in the States?"

Lisa could tell that the question had mined Richard's core of political pessimism, and he started to frame an answer; but Dowdy talked through him.

"That's part of the change," he said. "All them scientists say they figured out reasons for the violence and pollution and economic failure, but what them things really are is just the sound of consensus reality scrapin' contrary to the flow of the change. They ain't nothin' but symptoms of the real change, of everything comin' to an end."

Richard made silent speech with his eyes, indicating that it was time to leave.

"Now, now," said Dowdy, who had caught the signal. "Don't get me wrong. I ain't talkin' Apocalypse, here. And I for sure ain't no Bible basher like them Mormons you see walkin' 'round the villages. Huh! Them suckers is so scared of life they travel in pairs so's they can keep

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each other from bein' corrupted. 'Watch it there, Billy! You're steppin' in some sin!' " Dowdy rolled his eyes to the ceiling in a parody of prayer. " 'Sweet Jesus gimme the strength to scrape this sin off my shoe!' Then off they go, purified, a couple of All-American haircuts with souls stuffed fulla white-bread gospel and crosses 'round their necks to keep off the vampire women. Shit!" He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "But I digress. I got me a religion all right. Not Jesus, though. I'll tell you 'bout it if you want, but I ain't gonna force it down your throat."

"Well," Richard began, but Lisa interrupted.

"We've got an hour until the boat," she said. "Does your religion have anything to do with your living in the volcano?"

"Sure does." Dowdy pulled a hand-rolled cigar from his shirt pocket, lit it, and blew out a plume of smoke that boiled into a bluish cloud against the windowpanes. "I used to smoke, drink"—he flourished his beer—"and I was a bear for the ladies. Praise God, religion ain't changed that none!" He laughed, and Lisa smiled at him. Whatever it was that had put Dowdy in such good spirits seemed to be contagious. "Actually," he said, "I wasn't a hell-raiser at all. I was a painfully shy little fella, come from backwoods Tennessee. Like my daddy'd say, town so small you could spit between the city limits signs. Anyway, I was shy but I was smart, and with that combination it was a natural for me to end up in computers. Gave me someone I could feel comfortable talkin' to. After college I took a job designin' software out in Silicon Valley, and seven years later there I was. . . . Livin' in an apartment tract with no real friends, no pictures on the walls, and a buncha terminals. A real computer nerd. Wellsir! Somehow I got it in mind to take a vacation. I'd never had one. Guess I figured I'd just end up somewhere weird, sittin' in a room and thinkin' 'bout computers, so what was the point? But I was determined to do it this time, and I came to Panajachel. First few days I did what you folks probably been doin'. Wanderin', not meetin' anyone, buyin' a few gee-gaws. Then I caught the launch across the lake and ran into ol' Murcielago." He clucked his tongue against his teeth. "Man, I didn't know what to make of him at first. He was the oldest human bein' I'd ever seen. Looked centuries old. All hunched up, white-haired, as wrinkled as a walnut shell. He couldn't speak no English, just Cakchiquel, but he had this mestizo fella with him who did his interpretin', and it was through him I learned that Murcielago was a *brujo.*"

"A wizard," said Lisa, who had read Casteneda, to Richard, who hadn't.

"Yep," said Dowdy. "Course I didn't believe it. Thought it was some kinda hustle. But he interested me, and I kept hangin' 'round just to see what he was up to. Well, one night he says to me—through the mestizo fella—'I like you,' he says. 'Ain't nothin' wrong with you that a little magic wouldn't cure. I'd be glad to make you a gift if you got no objections.' I said to myself, 'Oh-oh, here it comes.' But I reckoned it couldn't do me no harm to let him play his hand, and I told him to go ahead. So he does some singin' and rubs powder on my mouth and mutters and touches me,

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and that was it. 'You gonna be fine now,' he tells me. I felt sorta strange, but no finer than I had. Still, there wasn't any hustle, and that same night I realized that his magic was doin' its stuff. Confused the hell out of me, and the only thing I could think to do was to hike on up to the volcano, where he lived, and ask him about it. Murcielago was waitin' for me. The mestizo had gone, but he'd left a note explainin' the situation. Seems he'd learned all he could from Murcielago and had taken up his own post, and it was time the ol' man had a new apprentice. He told me how to cook for him, wished me luck, and said he'd be seein' me around." Dowdy twirled his cigar and watched smoke rings float up. "Been there ever since and ain't regretted it a day."

Richard was incredulous. "You gave up a job in Silicon Valley to become a sorcerer's apprentice?"

"That's right." Dowdy pulled at one of the feathers in his hair. "But I didn't give up nothin' real, Richard."

"How do you know my name?"

"People grow into their names, and if you know how to look for it, it's written everywhere on 'em. 'Bout half of magic is bein' able to see clear."

Richard snorted. "You read our names off the passenger manifest for the launch."

"I don't blame you for thinkin' that," said Dowdy. "It's hard to accept the existence of magic. But that ain't how it happened." He drained the dregs of his beer. "You were easy to read, but Lisa here was sorta hard 'cause she never liked her name. Ain't that so?"

Lisa nodded, surprised.

"Yeah, see when a person don't like their name it muddies up the writin' so to speak, and you gotta scour away a lotta half-formed names to see down to the actual one." Dowdy heaved a sigh and stood. "Time I'm takin' care of business, but tell you what! I'll bring ol' Murcielago down to the bar around seven o'clock and you can check him out. You can catch the nine o'clock boat back. I know he'd like to meet you."

"*How* do you know?" asked Richard.

"It ain't my place to explain. Look here, Rich. I ain't gonna twist your arm, but if you go back to Panajachel you're just gonna wander 'round and maybe buy some garbage. If you stay, well, whether or not you believe Murcielago's a *brujo,* you'll be doin' somethin' out of the ordinary. Could be he'll give you a gift.

"What gift did he give you?" asked Lisa.

"The gift of gab," said Dowdy. "Surprised you ain't deduced that for yourself, Lisa, 'cause I can tell you're a perceptive soul. 'Course that was just part of the gift. The gift wrappin', as it were. It's like Murcielago says, a real gift ain't known by its name." He winked at her. "But it took pretty damn good, didn't it?"

As soon as Dowdy had gone, Richard asked Lisa if she wanted a last look at the weaving before heading back, but she told him she would like

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to meet Murcielago. He argued briefly, then acquiesced. She knew what he was thinking. He had no interest in the *brujo,* but he would humor her; it would be an Experience, a Shared Memory, another increment of momentum added to the spin of their marriage. To pass the time she bought a notebook from a tiny store, whose entire inventory would have fit in her suitcases, and sat outside the bar sketching the volcanoes, the people, the houses. Richard *oohed* and *ahhed* over the sketches, but in her judgment they were lifeless—accurate, yet dull and uninspired. She kept at it, though; it beat her other options.

Toward four o'clock black thunderheads muscled up from behind the volcano, drops of cold rain spattered down, and they retreated into the bar. Lisa did not intend to get drunk, but she found herself drinking to Richard's rhythm. He would nurse each beer for a while, shearing away the label with his thumbnail; once the label had been removed he would empty the bottle in a few swallows and bring them a couple more. After four bottles she was tipsy, and after six walking to the bathroom became an adventure in vertigo. Once she stumbled against the only other customer, a long-haired guy left over from the morning crowd, and caused him to spill his drink. "My pleasure," he said when she apologized, leering, running his hands along her hips as he pushed her gently away. She wanted to pose a vicious comeback, but was too fuddled. The bathroom served to make her drunker. It was a chamber of horrors, a hole in the middle of the floor with a ridged footprint on either side, scraps of brown paper strewn about, dark stains everywhere, reeking. There was a narrow window which—if she stood on tip-toe—offered a view of two volcanoes and the lake. The water mirrored the grayish-black of the sky. She stared through the smeared glass, watching waves pile in toward shore, and soon she realized that she was staring at the scene with something like longing, as if the storm held a promise of resolution. By the time she returned to the bar, the bartender had lit three kerosene lamps; they added a shabby glory to the place, casting rich gleams along the countertop and gemmy orange reflections in the windowpanes. Richard had brought her a fresh beer.

"They might not come, what with the rain," he said.

"Maybe not." She downed a swallow of beer, beginning to like its sour taste.

"Probably for the best," he said. "I've been thinking, and I'm sure he was setting us up for a robbery."

"You're paranoid. If he were going to rob us, he'd pick a spot where there weren't any soldiers."

"Well, he's got something in mind . . . though I have to admit that was a clever story he told. All that stuff about his own doubts tended to sandbag any notion that he was hustling us."

"I don't believe he was hustling us. Maybe he's deluded, but he's not a criminal."

"How the hell could you tell that?" He picked at a stubborn fleck of beer label. "Feminine intuition? God, he was only here a few minutes."

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"You know," she said angrily, "I deserve that. I've been buying that whole feminine intuition chump ever since we were married. I've let you play the intelligent one, while I"—she affected a southern accent and a breathy voice—"I just get these little flashes. I swear I don't know where they come from, but they turn out right so often I must be psychic or somethin'. Jesus!"

"Lisa, please."

He looked utterly defeated but she was drunk and sick of all the futile effort and she couldn't stop. "Any idiot could've seen that Dowdy was just a nice, weird little guy. Not a threat! But you had to turn him into a threat so you could feel you were protecting me from dangers I was too naïve to see. What's that do for you? Does it wipe out the fact that I've been unfaithful, that I've walked all over your self-respect? Does it restore your masculine pride?"

His face worked, and she hoped he would hit her, punctuate the murkiness of their lives with a single instance of shock and clarity. But she knew he wouldn't. He relied on his sadness to defeat her. "You must hate me," he said.

She bowed her head, her anger emptying into the hollow created by his dead voice. "I don't hate you. I'm just tired."

"Let's go home. Let's get it over with."

She glanced up, startled. His lips were thinned, a muscle clenching in his jaw.

"We can catch a flight tomorrow. If not tomorrow, the next day. I won't try to hold you anymore."

She was amazed by the panic she felt; she couldn't tell if it resulted from surprise, the kind you feel when you haven't shut the car door properly and suddenly there you are, hanging out the side, unprepared for the sight of the pavement flowing past; or if it was that she had never really wanted freedom, that all her protest had been a means of killing boredom. Maybe, she thought, this was a new tactic on his part, and then she realized that everything between them had become tactical. They played each other without conscious effort, and their games bordered on the absurd. To her further amazement she heard herself say in a tremulous voice, "Is that what *you* want?"

"Hell, no!" He smacked his palm against the table, rattling the bottles. "I want you! I want children, eternal love . . . all those dumb bullshit things we wanted in the beginning! But you don't want them anymore, do you?"

She saw how willingly she had given him an opening in which to assert his masculinity, his moral position, combining them into a terrific left hook to the heart. *Oh Jesus they were pathetic!* Tears started from her eyes, and she had a dizzying sense of location, as if she were looking up from a well-bottom through the strata of her various conditions. Drunk, in a filthy bar, in Guatemala, shadowed by volcanos, under a stormy sky, and—spanning it all, binding it all together—the strange webs of their relationship.

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"Do you?" He frowned at her, demanding that she finish the game, speak her line, admit to the one verity that prevented them from ever truly finishing—her uncertainty.

"I don't know," she answered; she tried to say it in a neutral tone, but it came out hopeless.

The storm's darkness passed, and true darkness slipped in under cover of the final clouds. Stars pricked out above the rim of the volcano. The food in the bar was greasy—fried fish, beans, and a salad that she was afraid to eat (stains on the lettuce)—but eating steadied her, and she managed to start a conversation about their recent meals. Remember the weird Chinese place in Mérida, hot sauce in the Lobster Cantonese? Or what had passed for crepes at their hotel in Zihuatenejo? Things like that. The bartender hauled out a portable record player and put on an album of romantic ballads sung by a man with a sexy voice and a gaspy female chorus; the needle kept skipping, and finally, with an apologetic smile and a shrug, the bartender switched it off. It came to be seven-thirty, and they talked about Dowdy not showing, about catching the eight o'clock boat. Then there he was. Standing in the door next to a tiny, shrunken old man, who was leaning on a cane. He was deeply wrinkled, skin the color of weathered mahogany, wearing grungy white trousers and a gray blanket draped around his shoulders. All his vitality seemed to have collected in an astounding shock of thick white hair that—to Lisa's drunken eyes—looked like a white flame licking up from his skull.

It took the old man almost a minute to hobble the length of the room, and a considerable time thereafter to lower himself, wheezing and shaking, into a chair. Dowdy hauled up another chair beside him; he had washed the dye from his beard, and his hair was clean, free of feathers. His manner, too, had changed. He was no longer breezy, but subdued and serious, and even his grammar had improved.

"Now listen," he said. "I don't know what Murcielago will say to you, but he's a man who speaks his mind and sometimes he tells people things they don't like to hear. Just remember he bears you no ill-will and don't be upset. All right?"

Lisa gave the old man a reassuring smile, not wanting him to think that they were going to laugh; but upon meeting his eyes all thought of reassuring him vanished. They were ordinary eyes. Dark; wet-looking under the lamplight. And yet they were compelling—like an animal's eyes, they radiated strangeness and pulled you in. They made the rest of his ruined face seem irrelevant. He muttered to Dowdy.

"He wants to know if you have any questions," said Dowdy.

Richard was apparently as fascinated by the old man as was Lisa; she had expected him to be glib and sardonic, but instead he cleared his throat and said gravely, "I'd like to hear about how the world's changing."

Dowdy repeated the question in Cakchiquel, and Murcielago began to

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speak, staring at Richard, his voice a gravelly whisper. At last he made a slashing gesture, signalling that he was finished, and Dowdy turned to them. "It's like this," he said. "The world is not one but many. Thousands upon thousands of worlds. Even those who do not have the power of clear sight can perceive this if they consider the myriad realities of the world they do see. It's easiest to imagine the thousands of worlds as different-colored lights all focused on a single point, having varying degrees of effectiveness as to how much part they play in determinin' the character of that point. What's happenin' now is that the strongest light—the one most responsible for determinin' this character—is startin' to fade and another is startin' to shine bright and dominate. When it has gained dominance, the old age will end and the new begin."

Richard smirked, and Lisa realized that he had been putting the old man on. "If that's the case," he said snottily, "then . . ."

Murcielago broke in with a burst of harsh, angry syllables.

"He doesn't care if you believe him," said Dowdy. "Only that you understand his words. Do you?"

"Yes." Richard mulled it over. "Ask him what the character of the new age will be."

Again, the process of interpretation.

"It'll be the first age of magic," said Dowdy. "You see, all the old tales of wizards and great beasts and warriors and undyin' kings, they aren't fantasy or even fragments of a distant past. They're visions, the first unclear glimpses seen long ago of a future that's now dawnin'. This place, Lake Atitlán, is one of those where the dawn has come early, where the light of the new age shines the strongest and its forms are visible to those who can see." The old man spoke again, and Dowdy arched an eyebrow. "Hmm! He says that because he's tellin' you this, and for reasons not yet clear to him, you will be more a part of the new age than the old."

Richard gave Lisa a nudge under the table, but she chose to ignore it. "Why hasn't someone noticed this change?" he asked.

Dowdy translated and in a moment had a response. "Murcielago says he has noticed it, and asks if you have not noticed it yourself. For instance, have you not noticed the increased interest in magic and other occult matters in your own land? And surely you must have noticed the breakdown of systems, economies, governments. This is due to the fact that the light that empowered them is fadin', not to any other cause. The change comes slowly. The dawn will take centuries to brighten into day, and then the sorrows of this age will be gone from the memories of all but those few who have the abililty to draw upon the dawnin' power and live long in their mortal bodies. Most will die and be reborn. The change comes subtly, as does twilight change to dusk, an almost imperceptible merging of light into dark. It will be noticed and it will be recorded. Then, just as the last age, it will be forgotten."

"I don't mean to be impertinent," said Richard, giving Lisa another

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nudge, "but Murcielago looks pretty frail. He can't have much of a role to play in all this."

The old man rapped the floor with his cane for emphasis as he answered, and Dowdy's tone was peeved. "Murcielago is involved in great struggles against enemies whose nature he's only beginnin' to discern. He has no time to waste with fools. But because you're not a total fool, because you need instruction, he will answer. Day by day his power grows, and at night the volcano is barely able to contain his force. Soon he will shed this frailty and flow between the forms of his spirit. He will answer no more of your questions." Dowdy looked to Lisa. "Do you have a question?"

Murcielago's stare burned into her, and she felt disoriented, as insubstantial as one of the gleams slipping across his eyes. "I don't know," she said. "Yes. What does he think about us?"

"This is a good question," said Dowdy after consulting with Murcielago, "because it concerns self-knowledge, and all important answers relate to the self. I will not tell you what you are. You know that, and you have shame in the knowledge. What you will be is manifest, and soon you will know that. Therefore I will answer the question you have not asked, the one that most troubles you. You and the man will part and come together, part and come together. Many times. For though you are lovers, you are not true companions and you both must follow your own ways. I will help you in this. I will free the hooks that tear at you and give you back your natures. And when this is done you and the man may share each other, may part and come together without sadness or weakness."

Murcielago fumbled for something under his blanket, and Dowdy glanced back and forth between Richard and Lisa. "He wants to make you a gift," he said.

"What kind of gift?" asked Richard.

"A gift is not known by its name," Dowdy reminded him. "But it won't be a mystery for long."

The old man muttered again and stretched out a trembling hand to Richard; in his palm were four black seeds.

"You must swallow them one at a time," said Dowdy. "And as you do, he will channel his power through them."

Richard's face tightened with suspicion. "It's some sort of drug, right? Take four and I won't care what happens."

Dowdy reverted to his ungrammatical self. "Life is a drug, man. You think me and the ol' boy are gonna get you high and boost your traveler's checks. Shit! You ain't thinkin' clear."

"Maybe that's exactly what you're going to do," said Richard stonily. "And I'm not falling for it."

Lisa slipped her hand into his. "They're not going to hurt us. Why don't you try it?"

"You believe this old fraud, don't you?" He disengaged his hand, looking betrayed. "You believe what he said about us?"

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"I'd like to believe it," she said. "It would be better than what we have, wouldn't it?"

The lamplight flickered, and a shadow veered across his face. Then the light steadied, and so it seemed did he. It was as if the orange glow were burning away eleven years of wrong-thinking, and the old unparanoid, sure-of-himself Richard was shining through. Christ, she wanted to say, you're really in there!

"Aw, hell! He who steals my purse steals only forty cents on the dollar, right?" He plucked the seeds from Murcielago's hand, picked one up and held it to his mouth. "Anytime."

Before letting Richard swallow the seeds, Murcielago sang for a while. The song made Lisa think of a comic fight in a movie, the guy carrying on a conversation in between ducking and throwing punches, packing his words into short, rushed phrases. Murcielago built it to a fierce rhythm, signaled Richard, and grunted each time a seed went down, putting—Lisa thought—some magical English on it.

"God!" said Richard afterward, eyes wide with mock awe. "I had no idea! The colors, the infinite harmony! If only. . ." He broke it off and blinked, as if suddenly waking to an unaccustomed thought.

Murcielago smiled and gave out with a growly, humming noise that Lisa assumed was a sign of satisfaction. "Where are mine?" she asked.

"It's different for you," said Dowdy. "He has to anoint you, touch you."

At this juncture Richard would normally have cracked a joke about dirty old men but he was gazing out the window at shadowy figures on the street. She asked if he were okay, and he patted her hand. "Yeah, don't worry. I'm just thinking."

Murcielago had pulled out a bottle of iodine-colored liquid and was dipping his fingers into it, wetting the tips. He began to sing again—a softer, less hurried song with the rhythm of fading echoes—and Dowdy had Lisa lean forward so the old man wouldn't have to strain to reach her. The song seemed to be all around her, turning her thoughts slow and drifty. Calloused brown fingers trembled in front of her face; the callouses were split, and the splits crusted with grime. She shut her eyes. The fingers left wet, cool tracks on her skin, and she could feel the shape he was tracing. A mask. Widening her eyes, giving her a smile, drawing curlicues on her cheeks and forehead. She had the idea that he was tracing the conformation of her real face, doing what the lamplight had done for Richard. Then his fingers brushed her eyelids. There was a stinging sensation, and dazzles exploded behind her eyes.

"Keep 'em shut," advised Dowdy. "It'll pass."

When at last she opened them, Dowdy was helping Murcielago to his feet. The old man nodded but did not smile at her as he had with Richard; from the thinned set of his mouth she took it that he was either measuring her or judging his work.

"That's all folks!" said Dowdy, grinning. "See? No dirty tricks, nothin' up his sleeve. Just good ol' new-fangled, stick-to-your-soul magic." He

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waved his arms high like an evangelist. "Can you feel it, brothers and sisters? Feel it wormin' its way through your bones?"

Richard mumbled affirmatively. He seemed lost in himself, studying the pattern of rips his thumb had scraped on the label of the beer bottle, and Lisa was beginning to feel a bit lost herself. "Do we pay him anything?" she asked Dowdy; her voice sounded small and metallic, like a recorded message.

"There'll come a day when the answer's Yes," said Dowdy. "But not now." The old man hobbled toward the door, Dowdy guiding him by the arm.

"Goodbye," called Lisa, alarmed by their abrupt exit.

"Yeah," said Dowdy over his shoulder, paying more attention to assisting Murcielago. "See ya."

They were mostly silent while waiting for the launch, limiting their conversation to asking how the other was doing and receiving distracted answers; and later, aboard the launch, the black water shining under the stars and the motor racketing, their silence deepened. They sat with their hips pressed together, and Lisa felt close to Richard; yet she also felt that the closeness wasn't important; or if it was, it was of memorial importance, a tribute to past closeness, because things were changing between them. That, too, she could feel. Old postures were being redefined, webs were tearing loose, shadowy corners of their souls were coming to light. She knew this was happening to Richard as well as herself, and she wondered how she knew, whether it was her gift to know these things. But the first real inkling she had of her gift was when she noticed that the stars were shining different colors—red, yellow, blue, and white—and there were pale gassy shapes passing across them. Clouds, she realized. Very high clouds that she would not ordinarily have seen. The sight frightened her, but a calm presence inside her would not admit to fright; and this presence, she further realized, had been there all along. Just like the true colors of the stars. It was her fearful self that was relatively new, an obscuring factor, and it—like the clouds—was passing. She considered telling Richard, but decided that he would be busy deciphering *his* gift. She concentrated on her own, and as they walked from the pier to the hotel, she saw halos around leaves, gleams coursing along electrical wires, and opaque films shifting over people's faces.

They went straight up to their room and lay without talking in the dark. But the room wasn't dark for Lisa. Pointilistic fires bloomed and faded in mid-air, seams of molten light spread along the cracks in the wall, and once a vague human shape—she identified it as a ghostly man wearing robes—crossed from the door to the window and vanished. Every piece of furniture began to glow golden around the edges, brighter and brighter, until it seemed they each had a more ornate shape superimposed. There came to be so much light that it disconcerted her, and though she was unafraid, she wished she could have a moment's normalcy

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just to get her bearings. And her wish was granted. In a wink the room had reverted to dim bulky shadows and a rectangle of streetlight slanting onto the floor from the window. She sat bolt upright, astonished that it could be controlled with such ease. Richard pulled her back down beside him and asked, "What is it?" She told him some of what she had seen, and he said, "It sounds like hallucinations."

"No, that's not how it feels," she said. "How about you?"

"I'm not hallucinating, anyway. I feel restless, penned in, and I keep thinking that I'm going somewhere. I mean I have this sense of motion, of speed, and I can almost tell where I am and who's with me. I'm full of energy; it's like I'm sixteen again or something." He paused. "And I'm having these thoughts that ought to scare me but don't.

"What, for instance?"

"For instance"—he laughed—"and this really the most important 'for instance,' I'll be thinking about us and I'll understand that what the old guy said about us parting is true, and I don't want to accept it. But I can't help accepting it. I know it's true, for the best. All that. And then I'll have that feeling of motion again. It's like I'm sensing the shape of an event or . . ." He shook his head, befuddled. "Maybe they did drug us, Lisa. We sound like a couple of acidheads out of the Sixties."

"I don't think so," she said; and then, after a silence, she asked, "Do you want to make love?"

He trailed his fingers along the curve of her stomach. "No offense, but I'm not sure I could concentrate on it just now."

"All right. But . . ."

He rolled onto his side and pressed against her, his breath warm on her cheeks. "You think we might not have another chance?"

Embarrassed, she turned her face into his chest. "I'm just horny is all."

"God, Lisa. You pick the weirdest times to get aroused."

"You've picked some pretty weird times yourself."

"I've always been absolutely correct in my behavior toward you, madam," he said in an English accent.

"Really? What about the time in Jim and Karen's bathroom?"

"I was drunk."

"Well? I'm nervous now. You know how that affects me."

"A common glandular condition, fraulein." German accent this time. "Correctable by simple surgery." He laughed and dropped the accent. "I wonder what Karen and Jim would be doing in our shoes."

For a while they told stories about what their various friends might do, and afterward they lay quietly, arms around each other. Richard's heart jolted against Lisa's breast, and she thought back to the first time they had been together this way. How protected she had felt, yet how fragile the strength of his heartbeat had made him seem. She'd had the idea that she could reach into his chest and touch his heart. And she could have. You had that much power over your lover; his heart was in your care, and at moments like this it was easy to believe that you would

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always be caring. But the moments failed you. They were peaks, and from them you slid into a mire where caring dissolved into mistrust and selfishness, where you saw that your feeling of being protected was illusory, and the moments were few and far-between. Marriage sought to institutionalize those moments, by law, to butter them over a ridiculous number of years; but all it did was lessen their intensity and open you up to a new potential for failure. Everyone talked about "good marriages," ones that evolved into hallowed friendships, an emeritus passion of the spirit. Maybe they did exist. Maybe there were—as Murcielago had implied—true companions. But most of the old marrieds Lisa had known were simply exhausted, weary of struggling, and had reached an accomodation with their mates based upon mutual despair. If Murcielago were right, if the world were changing, possibly the condition of marriage would change. Lisa doubted it, though. Hearts would have to be changed as well, and not even magic could affect their basic nature. Like with seashells, you could put your ear to one and hear the sad truth of an ocean breaking on a deserted shore. They were always empty, always unfulfilled. *Deeds fill them,* said an almost-voice inside her head, and she almost knew whose voice it had been; she pushed the knowledge aside, wanting to hold onto the moment.

Somebody shrieked in the courtyard. Not unusual. Groups of people frequently hung around the courtyard at night, smoking dope and exchanging bits of travel lore; the previous night two French girls and an American boy had been fighting with water pistols, and the girls had shrieked whenever they were hit. But this time the shriek was followed by shouts in Spanish and in broken English, a scream of pure terror, then silence. Richard sprang to his feet and cracked the door. Lisa moved up behind him. Another shout in Spanish—she recognized the word *doctor*. Richard put a finger to his lips and slipped out into the hall. Together they edged along the wall and peeked down into the courtyard. About a dozen guests were standing against the rear wall, some with their hands in the air; facing them, carrying automatic rifles, were three young men and a girl. Teenagers. Wearing jeans and polo shirts. A fourth man lay on the ground, his hands and head swathed in bandages. The guests were very pale—at this distance their eyes looked like raisins in uncooked dough—and a couple of the women were sobbing. One of the gunmen was wounded, a patch of blood staining his side; he was having to lean on the girl's shoulder, and his rifle barrel was wavering back and forth. With all the ferns sprouting around them, the pots of flowers hanging from the green stucco wall, the scene had an air of mythic significance—a chance meeting between good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

"Sssst!" A hiss behind Lisa's shoulder. It was the Guatemalan man who had watched her during dinner the night before; he had a machine pistol in one hand, and in the other he was flapping a leather card case. ID. He beckoned, and they moved after him down the hall. *"Policia!"* he whispered, displaying the ID; in the photograph he was younger, his

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mustache so black it appeared to have been painted on for a joke. His nervous eyes and baggy suit and five o'clock shadow reminded Lisa of 1940s movie heavies, the evil flunky out to kill George Sanders or Humphrey Bogart; but the way his breath whined through his nostrils, the oily smell of the gun, his radiation of callous stupidity, all that reduced her romantic impression. *"Malos!"* he said, pointing to the courtyard. *"Communistas! Guerrillas!"* He patted the gun barrel.

"Okay," said Richard, holding up both hands to show his neutrality, his non-involvement. But as the man crept toward the courtyard, toward the balcony railing, Richard locked his hands together and brought them down on the back of the man's neck, then fell atop him, kneeing and pummeling him. Lisa was frozen by the attack, half-disbelieving that Richard was capable of such decisive action. He scrambled to his feet, breathing hard, and tossed the machine pistol down into the courtyard. *"Amigos!"* he shouted, and turned to Lisa, his mouth still open from the shout.

Their eyes met, and that stare was a divorce, an acknowledgement that something was happening to separate them, happening right now, and though they weren't exactly sure what, they were willing to accept the fact and allow it to happen. "I couldn't let him shoot," said Richard. "I didn't have a choice." He sounded amazed, as if he hadn't known until this moment why he had acted.

Lisa wanted to console him, to tell him he'd done the right thing, but her emotions were locked away, under restraint, and she sensed a gulf between them that nothing could bridge—all their intimate connections were withdrawing, receding. Hooks, Murcielago had called them.

One of the guerrillas, the girl, was sneaking up the stairs, gun at the ready. She was pretty but on the chubby side, with shiny wings of black hair falling over her shoulders. She motioned for them to move back and nudged the unconscious man with her toe. He moaned, his hand twitched. "You?" she said, pointing at Richard and then to the man.

"He was going to shoot," said Richard hollowly.

From the girl's blank expression Lisa could tell that she hadn't understood. She rummaged in the man's jacket, pulled out the ID case and shouted in rapid-fire Spanish. *"Vamanos!"* she said to them, indicating that they should precede her down the stairs. As Lisa started down, there was a short burst of automatic fire from the hall; startled, she turned to see the girl lifting the barrel of her rifle from the man's head, a stippling of red droplets on the green stucco. The girl frowned and trained the rifle on her, and Lisa hurried after Richard, horrified. But before her emotional reaction could mature into fear, her vision began to erode.

Glowing white flickers were edging every figure in the room, with the exception of the bandaged man, and as they grew clearer, she realized that they were phantom human shapes; they were like the afterimages of movement you see on benzedrine, yet sharper and slower to fade, and the movements were different from those of their originals—an arm

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flailing, a half-formed figure falling or running off. Each time one vanished another would take its place. She tried to banish them, to will them away, but was unsuccessful, and she found that watching them distracted her from thinking about the body upstairs.

The tallest of the guerrillas—a gangly kid with a skull face and huge dark eyes and a skimpy mustache—entered into conversation with the girl, and Richard dropped to his knees beside the bandaged man. Blood had seeped through the layers of wrapping, producing a grotesque striping around the man's head. The gangly kid scowled and prodded Richard with his rifle.

"I'm a medic," Richard told him. *"Como un doctor."* Gingerly, he peeled back some layers of bandage and looked away, his face twisted in disgust. "Jesus Christ!"

"The soldiers torture him." The kid spat into the ferns. "They think he is *guerrillero,* because he's my cousin."

"And is he?" Richard was probing for a pulse under the bandaged man's jaw.

"No." The kid leaned over Richard's shoulder. "He studies at San Carlos University. But because we have killed the soldiers, now he will have to fight." Richard sighed, and the kid faltered. "It is good you are here. We think a friend is here, a doctor. But he's gone." He made a gesture toward the street. *"Pasado."*

Richard stood and cleaned his fingers on his jeans. "He's dead."

One of the women who had been sobbing let out a wail, and the kid snapped his rifle into firing position and shouted, *"Cayete, gringa!"* His face was stony, the vein in his temple throbbed. A balding, bearded man wearing an embroidered native shirt embraced the woman, muting her sobs, and glared fiercely at the kid; one of his afterimages raised a fist. The rest of the imprisoned guests were terrified, their Adam's apples working, eyes darting about; and the girl was arguing with the kid, pushing his rifle down. He kept shaking her off. Lisa felt detached from the tension, out of phase with existence, as if she were gazing down from a higher plane.

With what seemed foolhardy bravado, the bearded guy called out to Richard. "Hey, you! The American! You with these people or somethin'?"

Richard had squatted beside the wounded guerrilla—a boy barely old enough to shave—and was probing his side. "Or something," he said without glancing up. The boy winced and gritted his teeth and leaned on his friend, a boy not much older.

"You gonna let 'em kill us?" said the bearded guy. "That's what's happenin', y'know. The girl's sayin' to let us go, but the dude's tellin' her he wants to make a statement." Panic seeped into his voice. "Y'understand that, man? The dude's lookin' to waste us so he can make a statement."

"Take it easy." Richard got to his feet. "The bullet needs to come out," he said to the gangly kid. "I . . ."

The kid swiped at Richard's head with the rifle barrel, and Richard

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staggered back, clutching his brow; when he straightened up, Lisa saw blood welling from his hairline. "Your friend's going to die," he said stubbornly. "The bullet needs to come out." The kid jammed the muzzle of the rifle into Richard's throat, forcing him to tip back his head.

With a tremendous effort of will Lisa shook off the fog that had enveloped her. The afterimages vanished. "He's trying to help you," she said, going toward the kid. "Don't you understand?" The girl pushed her back and aimed her rifle at Lisa's stomach. Looking into her eyes, Lisa had an intimation of the depth of her seriousness, the ferocity of her commitment. "He's trying to help," Lisa repeated. The girl studied her, and after a moment she called over her shoulder to the kid. Some of the hostility drained from the kid's face and was replaced by suspicion.

"Why?" the kid asked Richard. "Why you help us?"

Richard seemed confused, and then he started to laugh; he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, smearing the blood and sweat, and laughed some more. The kid was puzzled at first, but a few seconds later he smiled and nodded as if he and Richard were sharing a secret male joke. "Okay," he said. "Okay. You help him. But here is danger. We go now."

"Yeah," said Richard, absorbing this. "Yeah, okay." He stepped over to Lisa and drew her into a smothering hug. She gripped his shoulders hard, and she thought her emotions were going to break free; but when he stepped back, appearing stunned, she sensed again that distance between them. . . . He put his arm around the wounded boy and helped him through the entrance; the others were already peering out the door. Lisa followed. The rows of tourist shops and restaurants looked unreal—a deserted stage set—and the colors seemed streaky and too bright. Parked under a streetlight near the entrance, gleaming toylike in the yellow glare, was a Suzuki mini-truck, the kind with a canvas-draped frame over the rear. Beyond it the road wound away into darkened hills. The girl vaulted the tailgate and hauled the wounded boy after her; the other two climbed into the cab and fired the engine. Only Richard was left standing on the cobblestones.

"*Dase prisa!*" The girl banged on the tailgate.

As Richard hesitated, there was a volley of shots. The noise sent Lisa scuttling away from the entrance toward the lake. Three policemen were behind a parked car on the opposite side of the street. More shots. The girl returned their fire, blowing out the windshield of the car, and they ducked out of sight. Another shot. Sparks and stone chips were kicked up near Richard's feet. Still he hesitated.

"Richard!" Lisa had intended the shout as a caution, but the name floated out of her, not desperate-sounding at all—it had the ring of an assurance. He dove for the tailgate. The girl helped him scramble inside, and the truck sped off over the first rise. The policemen ran after it, firing; then, like Keystone Cops, they put on the brakes and ran in the opposite direction.

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Lisa had a flash-feeling of anguish that almost instantly began to subside, as if it had been the freakish firing of a nerve. Dazedly, she moved further away from the hotel entrance. A jeep stuffed with policemen came swerving past, but she hardly noticed. The world was dissolving in golden light, every source of light intensifying and crumbling the outlines of things. Streetlights burned like novas, sunbursts shone from windows, and even the cracks in the sidewalk glowed; misty shapes were fading into view, overlaying the familiar with tall, peak-roofed houses and carved wagons and people dressed in robes. All rippling, illusory. It was as if a fantastic illustration were coming to life, and she was the only real-life character left in the story, a contemporary Alice with designer jeans and turquoise earrings, who had been set to wander through a golden fairytale. She was entranced, and yet at the same time she resented the fact that the display was cheating her of the right to sadness. She needed to sort herself out, and she continued toward the lake, toward the pier where she and Richard had kissed. By the time she reached it, the lake itself had been transformed into a scintillating body of light and out on the water the ghost of a sleek sailboat, its canvas belling, glided past for an instant and was gone.

She sat at the end of the pier, dangling her feet over the edge. The cool roughness of the planks was a comfort, a proof against the strangeness of the world . . . or was it *worlds?* The forms of the new age. Was that what she saw? Weary of seeing it, she willed the light away and before she could register whether or not she had been successful, she shut her eyes and tried to think about Richard. And, as if thought were a vehicle for sight, she saw him. A ragged-edged patch of vision appeared against the darkness of her closed eyes, like a hole punched through black boards. He was sitting on the oil-smeared floor of the truck, cradling the wounded boy's head in his lap; the girl was bending over the boy, mopping his forehead, holding onto Richard's shoulder so the bouncing of the truck wouldn't throw her off-balance. Lisa felt a pang of jealousy, but she kept watching for a very long time. She didn't wonder how she saw them. It all meant something, and she knew that meaning would come clear.

When she opened her eyes, she found it had grown pitch-dark. She couldn't see her hand in front of her face and she panicked, thinking she had gone blind; but accompanying the panic was a gradual brightening, and she realized that she must have willed away all light. Soon the world had returned to normal. Almost. Though the slopes of the volcanos were unlighted—shadows bulking against the stars—above each of their cones blazed a nimbus of ruby glow, flickering with an inconstant rhythm. The glow above Murcielago's volcano was the brightest—at least it was for a few seconds. Then it faded, and in its place a fan of rippling white radiance sprayed from the cone, penetrating high into the dark. It was such an eerie sight, she panicked. Christ, what was she doing just sitting here and watching pretty lights? And what was she going to do? Inse-

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curity and isolation combined into an electricity that jolted her to her feet. Maybe there was an antidote for this, maybe the thing to do would be to go see Murcielago . . . And she remembered Dowdy's story. How he'd been afraid and had gone to Murcielago, only to find that the old apprentice had taken up his own post, leaving a vacancy. She looked back at the other two volcanos, still pulsing with their ruby glow. Dowdy and the mestizo? It had to be. The white light was Murcielago's vacancy sign. The longer she stared at it, the more certain that knowledge became.

Stunned by the prospect of setting out on such an eccentric course, by the realization that everything she knew was dissolving in light or fleeing into darkness, she walked away from the pier, following the shoreline. She wanted to hold onto Richard, to sadness—her old familiar and their common woe—but with each step her mood brightened, and she couldn't even feel guilty about not being sad. Four or five hours would take her to the far side of the lake. A long walk, alone, in the dark, hallucinations lurking behind every bush. She could handle it, though. It would give her time to work at controlling her vision, to understand some of what she saw, and when she had climbed the volcano she'd find a rickety cabin back in under the lip, a place as quirky as Dowdy himself. She saw it the same way she had seen Richard and the girl. Tilting walls; ferns growing from the roof; a door made from the side of a packing crate, with the legend THIS END UP upside down. Tacked to the door was a piece of paper, probably Dowdy's note explaining the care and feeding of wizards. And inside, the thousandfold forms of his spirit compacted into a gnarled shape, a nugget of power (she experienced an upwelling of sadness, and then she felt that power surging through her, nourishing her own strength, making her aware of the thousands of bodies of light she was, all focused upon this moment in her flesh), there Murcielago would be waiting to teach her power's usage and her purpose in the world. *Oh God, Richard, goodbye.* ●

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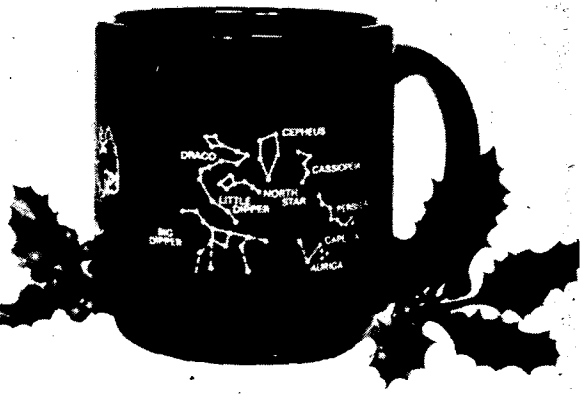

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by Frederik Pohl

FERMI AND FROST

art John Jinks

There's an organization called World SF—an international association for people who have a professional connection of any kind with science fiction—and its conventions are pretty special. At the most recent one, in Brighton, England, in April 1984, the author says, "I was sitting in the lounge with colleagues from four or five countries. On one side of me a couple of English space scientists were discussing the Fermi question; on the other a Russian, and an Austrian were asking Joe Haldeman and Betty Ann Hull to explain 'nuclear winter' to them . . . and on the interminable flight back the two conversations came together in my mind, and by the time we landed at Kennedy I had 'Fermi and Frost' all roughed out."

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On Timothy Clary's ninth birthday he got no cake. He spent all of it in a bay of the TWA terminal at John F. Kennedy airport in New York, sleeping fitfully, crying now and then from exhaustion or fear. All he had to eat was stale Danish pastries from the buffet wagon and not many of them, and he was fearfully embarrassed because he had wet his pants. Three times. Getting to the toilets over the packed refugee bodies was just about impossible. There were twenty-eight hundred people in a space designed for a fraction that many, and all of them with the same idea. Get away! Climb the highest mountain! Drop yourself splat, spang, right in the middle of the widest desert! Run! Hide!—

And pray. Pray as hard as you can, because even the occasional plane-load of refugees that managed to fight their way aboard and even take off had no sure hope of refuge when they got wherever the plane was going. Families parted. Mothers pushed their screaming children aboard a jet and melted back into the crowd before screaming, more quietly, themselves.

Because there had been no launch order yet, or none that the public had heard about anyway, there might still be time for escape. A little time. Time enough for the TWA terminal, and every other airport terminal everywhere, to jam up with terrified lemmings. There was no doubt that the missiles were poised to fly. The attempted Cuban coup had escalated wildly, and one nuclear sub had attacked another with a nuclear charge. That, everyone agreed, was the signal. The next event would be the final one.

Timothy knew little of this, but there would have been nothing he could have done about it—except perhaps cry, or have nightmares, or wet himself, and young Timothy was doing all of those anyway. He did not know where his father was. He didn't know where his mother was, either, except that she had gone somewhere to try to call his father; but then there had been a surge that could not be resisted when three 747s at once had announced boarding, and Timothy had been carried far from where he had been left. Worse than that. Wet as he was, with a cold already, he was beginning to be very sick. The young woman who had brought him the Danish pastries put a worried hand to his forehead and drew it away helplessly. The boy needed a doctor. But so did a hundred others, elderly heart patients and hungry babies and at least two women close to childbirth.

If the terror had passed and the frantic negotiations had succeeded, Timothy might have found his parents again in time to grow up and marry and give them grandchildren. If one side or the other had been able to preempt, and destroy the other, and save itself, Timothy forty years later might have been a graying, cynical colonel in the American military government of Leningrad. (Or body servant to a Russian one

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in Detroit.) Or if his mother had pushed just a little harder earlier on, he might have wound up in the plane of refugees that reached Pittsburgh just in time to become plasma. Or if the girl who was watching him had become just a little more scared, and a little more brave, and somehow managed to get him through the throng to the improvised clinics in the main terminal, he might have been given medicine, and found somebody to protect him, and take him to a refuge, and live. . . .

But that is in fact what did happen!

Because Harry Malibert was on his way to a British Interplanetary Society seminar in Portsmouth, he was already sipping Beefeater Martinis in the terminal's Ambassador Club when the unnoticed TV at the bar suddenly made everybody notice it.

Those silly nuclear-attack communications systems that the radio stations tested out every now and then, and nobody paid any attention to any more—why, this time it was real! They were serious! Because it was winter and snowing heavily Malibert's flight had been delayed anyway. Before its rescheduled departure time came, all flights had been embargoed. Nothing would leave Kennedy until some official somewhere decided to let them go.

Almost at once the terminal began to fill with would-be refugees. The Ambassador Club did not fill at once. For three hours the ground-crew stew at the desk resolutely turned away everyone who rang the bell who could not produce the little red card of admission; but when the food and drink in the main terminals began to run out the Chief of Operations summarily opened the club to everyone. It didn't help relieve the congestion outside, it only added to what was within. Almost at once a volunteer doctors' committee seized most of the club to treat the ill and injured from the thickening crowds, and people like Harry Malibert found themselves pushed into the bar area. It was one of the Operations staff, commandeering a gin and tonic at the bar for the sake of the calories more than the booze, who recognized him. "You're Harry Malibert. I heard you lecture once, at Northwestern."

Malibert nodded. Usually when someone said that to him he answered politely, "I hope you enjoyed it," but this time it did not seem appropriate to be normally polite. Or normal at all.

"You showed slides of Arecibo," the man said dreamily. "You said that radio telescope could send a message as far as the Great Nebula in Andromeda, two million light-years away—if only there was another radio telescope as good as that one there to receive it."

"You remember very well," said Malibert, surprised.

"You made a big impression, Dr. Malibert." The man glanced at his watch, debated, took another sip of his drink. "It really sounded won-

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derful, using the big telescopes to listen for messages from alien civilizations somewhere in space—maybe hearing some, maybe making contact, maybe not being alone in the universe any more. You made me wonder why we hadn't seen some of these people already, or anyway heard from them—but maybe," he finished, glancing bitterly at the ranked and guarded aircraft outside, "maybe now we know why."

Malibert watched him go, and his heart was leaden. The thing he had given his professional career to—SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence—no longer seemed to matter. If the bombs went off, as everyone said they must, then that was ended for a good long time, at least—

Gabble of voices at the end of the bar; Malibert turned, leaned over the mahogany, peered. The *Please Stand By* slide had vanished, and a young black woman with pomaded hair, voice trembling, was delivering a news bulletin:

"—the president has confirmed that a nuclear attack has begun against the United States. Missiles have been detected over the Arctic, and they are incoming. Everyone is ordered to seek shelter and remain there pending instructions—"

Yes. It was ended, thought Malibert, at least for a good long time.

The surprising thing was that the news that it had begun changed nothing. There were no screams, no hysteria. The order to seek shelter meant nothing at John F. Kennedy Airport, where there was no shelter any better than the building they were in. And that, no doubt, was not too good. Malibert remembered clearly the strange aerodynamic shape of the terminal's roof. Any blast anywhere nearby would tear that off and send it sailing over the bay to the Rockaways, and probably a lot of the people inside with it.

But there was nowhere else to go.

There were still camera crews at work, heaven knew why. The television set was showing crowds in Times Square and Newark, a clot of automobiles stagnating on the George Washington Bridge, their drivers abandoning them and running for the Jersey shore. A hundred people were peering around each other's heads to catch glimpses of the screen, but all that anyone said was to call out when he recognized a building or a street.

Orders rang out: "You people will have to move back! We need the room! Look, some of you, give us a hand with these patients." Well, that seemed useful, at least. Malibert volunteered at once and was given the care of a young boy, teeth chattering, hot with fever. "He's had tetracyclin," said the doctor who turned the boy over to him. "Clean him up if you can, will you? He ought to be all right if—"

If any of them were, thought Malibert, not requiring her to finish the

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sentence. How did you clean a young boy up? The question answered itself when Malibert found the boy's trousers soggy and the smell told him what the moisture was. Carefully he laid the child on a leather love seat and removed the pants and sopping undershorts. Naturally the boy had not come with a change of clothes. Malibert solved that with a pair of his own jockey shorts out of his briefcase—far too big for the child, of course, but since they were meant to fit tightly and elastically they stayed in place when Malibert pulled them up to the waist. Then he found paper towels and pressed the blue jeans as dry as he could. It was not very dry. He grimaced, laid them over a bar stool and sat on them for a while, drying them with body heat. They were only faintly wet ten minutes later when he put them back on the child—

San Francisco, the television said, had ceased to transmit.

Malibert saw the Operations man working his way toward him and shook his head. "It's begun," Malibert said, and the man looked around. He put his face close to Malibert's.

"I can get you out of here," he whispered. "There's an Icelandic DC-8 loading right now. No announcement. They'd be rushed if they did. There's room for you, Dr. Malibert."

It was like an electric shock. Malibert trembled. Without knowing why he did it, he said, "Can I put the boy on instead?"

The Operations man looked annoyed. "Take him with you, of course," he said. "I didn't know you had a son."

"I don't," said Malibert. But not out loud. And when they were in the jet he held the boy in his lap as tenderly as though he were his own.

If there was no panic in the Ambassador Club at Kennedy there was plenty of it everywhere else in the world. What everyone in the superpower cities knew was that their lives were at stake. Whatever they did might be in vain, and yet they had to do something. Anything! Run, hide, dig, brace, stow . . . pray. The city people tried to desert the metropolises for the open safety of the country, and the farmers and the exurbanites sought the stronger, safer buildings of the cities.

And the missiles fell.

The bombs that had seared Hiroshima and Nagasaki were struck matches compared to the hydrogen-fusion flares that ended eighty million lives in those first hours. Firestorms fountained above a hundred cities. Winds of three hundred kilometers an hour pulled in cars and debris and people, and they all became ash that rose to the sky. Splatters of melted rock and dust sprayed into the air.

The sky darkened.

Then it grew darker still.

* * *

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When the Icelandic jet landed at Keflavik Airport Malibert carried the boy down the passage to the little stand marked *Immigration*. The line was long, for most of the passengers had no passports at all, and the immigration woman was very tired of making out temporary entrance permits by the time Malibert reached her. "He's my son," Malibert lied. "My wife has his passport, but I don't know where my wife is."

She nodded wearily. She pursed her lips, looked toward the door beyond which her superior sat sweating and initialing reports, then shrugged and let them through. Malibert took the boy to a door marked *Snirting*, which seemed to be the Icelandic word for toilets, and was relieved to see that at least Timothy was able to stand by himself while he urinated, although his eyes stayed half closed. His head was very hot. Malibert prayed for a doctor in Reykjavik.

In the bus the English-speaking tour guide in charge of them—she had nothing else to do, for her tour would never arrive—sat on the arm of a first-row seat with a microphone in her hand and chattered vivaciously to the refugees. "Chicago? Ya, is gone, Chicago. And Detroit and Pittis-burrug—is bad. New York? Certainly New York too!" she said severely, and the big tears rolling down her cheek made Timothy cry too.

Malibert hugged him. "Don't worry, Timmy," he said. "No one would bother bombing Reykjavik." And no one would have. But when the bus was ten miles farther along there was a sudden glow in the clouds ahead of them that made them squint. Someone in the USSR had decided that it was time for neatening up loose threads. That someone, whoever remained in whatever remained of their central missile control, had realized that no one had taken out that supremely, insultingly dangerous bastion of imperialist American interests in the North Atlantic, the United States airbase at Keflavik.

Unfortunately, by then EMP and attrition had compromised the accuracy of their aim. Malibert had been right. No one would have bothered bombing Reykjavik—on purpose—but a forty-mile miss did the job anyway, and Reykjavik ceased to exist.

They had to make a wide detour inland to avoid the fires and the radiation. And as the sun rose on their first day in Iceland, Malibert, drowsing over the boy's bed after the Icelandic nurse had shot him full of antibiotics, saw the daybreak in awful, sky-drenching red.

It was worth seeing, for in the days to come there was no daybreak at all.

The worst was the darkness, but at first that did not seem urgent. What was urgent was rain. A trillion trillion dust particles nucleated water vapor. Drops formed. Rain fell—torrents of rain; sheets and cascades of rain. The rivers swelled. The Mississippi overflowed, and the

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Ganges, and the Yellow. The High Dam at Aswan spilled water over its lip, then crumbled. The rains came where rains came never. The Sahara knew flash floods. The Flaming Mountains at the edge of the Gobi flamed no more; a ten-year supply of rain came down in a week and rinsed the dusty slopes bare.

And the darkness stayed.

The human race lives always eighty days from starvation. That is the sum of stored food, globe wide. It met the nuclear winter with no more and no less.

The missiles went off on the 11th of June. If the world's larders had been equally distributed, on the 30th of August the last mouthful would have been eaten. The starvation deaths would have begun and ended in the next six weeks; exit the human race.

The larders were not equally distributed. The Northern Hemisphere was caught on one foot, fields sown, crops not yet grown. Nothing did grow there. The seedlings poked up through the dark earth for sunlight, found none, died. Sunlight was shaded out by the dense clouds of dust exploded out of the ground by the H-bombs. It was the Cretaceous repeated; extinction was in the air.

There were mountains of stored food in the rich countries of North America and Europe, of course, but they melted swiftly. The rich countries had much stored wealth in the form of their livestock. Every steer was a million calories of protein and fat. When it was slaughtered, it saved thousands of other calories of grain and roughage for every day lopped off its life in feed. The cattle and pigs and sheep—even the goats and horses; even the pet bunnies and the chicks; even the very kittens and hamsters—they all died quickly and were eaten, to eke out the stores of canned foods and root vegetables and grain. There was no rationing of the slaughtered meat. It had to be eaten before it spoiled.

Of course, even in the rich countries the supplies were not equally distributed. The herds and the grain elevators were not located on Times Square or in the Loop. It took troops to convoy corn from Iowa to Boston and Dallas and Philadelphia. Before long, it took killing. Then it could not be done at all.

So the cities starved first. As the convoys of soldiers made the changeover from seizing food for the cities to seizing food for themselves, the riots began, and the next wave of mass death. These casualties didn't usually die of hunger. They died of someone else's.

It didn't take long. By the end of "summer" the frozen remnants of the cities were all the same. A few thousand skinny, freezing desperadoes survived in each, sitting guard over their troves of canned and dried and frozen foodstuffs.

Every river in the world was running sludgy with mud to its mouth,

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as the last of the trees and grasses died and relaxed their grip on the soil. Every rain washed dirt away. As the winter dark deepened the rains turned to snow. The Flaming Mountains were sheeted in ice now, ghostly, glassy fingers uplifted to the gloom. Men could walk across the Thames at London now, the few men who were left. And across the Hudson, across the Whangpoo, across the Missouri between the two Kansas Cities. Avalanches rumbled down on what was left of Denver. In the stands of dead timber grubs flourished. The starved predators scratched them out and devoured them. Some of the predators were human. The last of the Hawaiians were finally grateful for their termites.

A Western human being—comfortably pudgy on a diet of 2800 calories a day, resolutely jogging to keep the flab away or mournfully conscience-stricken at the thickening thighs and the waistbands that won't quite close—can survive for forty-five days without food. By then the fat is gone. Protein reabsorption of the muscles is well along. The plump housewife or businessman is a starving scarecrow. Still, even then care and nursing can still restore health.

Then it gets worse.

Dissolution attacks the nervous system. Blindness begins. The flesh of the gums recedes, and the teeth fall out. Apathy becomes pain, then agony, then coma.

Then death. Death for almost every person on Earth. . . .

For forty days and forty nights the rain fell, and so did the temperature. Iceland froze over.

To Harry Malibert's astonishment and dawning relief, Iceland was well equipped to do that. It was one of the few places on Earth that could be submerged in snow and ice and still survive.

There is a ridge of volcanoes that goes almost around the Earth. The part that lies between America and Europe is called the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and most of it is under water. Here and there, like boils erupting along a forearm, volcanic islands poke up above the surface. Iceland is one of them. It was because Iceland was volcanic that it could survive when most places died of freezing, but it was also because it had been cold in the first place.

The survival authorities put Malibert to work as soon as they found out who he was. There was no job opening for a radio astronomer interested in contacting far-off (and very likely non-existent) alien races. There was, however, plenty of work for persons with scientific training, especially if they had the engineering skills of a man who had run Arecibo for two years. When Malibert was not nursing Timothy Clary through the slow and silent convalescence from his pneumonia, he was calculating heat losses and pumping rates for the piped geothermal water.

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Iceland filled itself with enclosed space. It heated the spaces with water from the boiling underground springs.

Of heat it had plenty. Getting the heat from the geyser fields to the enclosed spaces was harder. The hot water was as hot as ever, since it did not depend at all on sunlight for its calories, but it took a lot more of it to keep out a −30°C chill than a +5°C one. It wasn't just to keep the surviving people warm that they needed energy. It was to grow food.

Iceland had always had a lot of geothermal greenhouses. The flowering ornamentals were ripped out and food plants put in their place. There was no sunlight to make the vegetables and grains grow, so the geothermal power-generating plants were put on max output. Solar-spectrum incandescents flooded the trays with photons. Not just in the old greenhouses. Gymnasia, churches, schools—they all began to grow food under the glaring lights. There was other food, too, metric tons of protein baaing and starving in the hills. The herds of sheep were captured and slaughtered and dressed—and put outside again, to freeze until needed. The animals that froze to death on the slopes were bulldozed into heaps of a hundred, and left where they were. Geodetic maps were carefully marked to show the location of each heap.

It was, after all, a blessing that Reykjavik had been nuked. That meant half a million fewer people for the island's resources to feed.

When Malibert was not calculating load factors, he was out in the desperate cold, urging on the workers. Sweating navvies tried to muscle shrunken fittings together in icy foxholes that their body heat kept filling with icewater. They listened patiently as Malibert tried to give orders—his few words of Icelandic were almost useless, but even the navvies sometimes spoke tourist-English. They checked their radiation monitors, looked up at the storms overhead, returned to their work and prayed. Even Malibert almost prayed when one day, trying to locate the course of the buried coastal road, he looked out on the sea ice and saw a gray-white ice hummock that was not an ice hummock. It was just at the limits of visibility, dim on the fringe of the road crew's work lights, and it moved. "A polar bear!" he whispered to the head of the work crew, and everyone stopped while the beast shambled out of sight.

From then on they carried rifles.

When Malibert was not (incompetent) technical advisor to the task of keeping Iceland warm or (almost incompetent, but learning) substitute father to Timothy Clary, he was trying desperately to calculate survival chances. Not just for them; for the entire human race. With all the desperate flurry of survival work, the Icelanders spared time to think of the future. A study team was created, physicists from the University of Reykjavik, the surviving Supply officer from the Keflavik airbase, a

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meteorologist on work-study from the University of Leyden to learn about North Atlantic air masses. They met in the gasthuis where Malibert lived with the boy, and usually Timmy sat silent next to Malibert while they talked. What they wanted was to know how long the dust cloud would persist. Some day the particles would finish dropping from the sky, and then the world could be reborn—if enough survived to parent a new race, anyway. But when? They could not tell. They did not know how long, how cold, how killing the nuclear winter would be. "We don't know the megatonnage," said Malibert, "we don't know what atmospheric changes have taken place, we don't know the rate of insolation. We only know it will be bad."

"It is already bad," grumbled Thorsid Magnesson, Director of Public Safety. (Once that office had had something to do with catching criminals, when the major threat to safety was crime.)

"It will get worse," said Malibert, and it did. The cold deepened. The reports from the rest of the world dwindled. They plotted maps to show what they knew to show. One set of missile maps, to show where the strikes had been—within a week that no longer mattered, because the deaths from cold already began to outweigh those from blast. They plotted isotherm maps, based on the scattered weather reports that came in—maps that had to be changed every day, as the freezing line marched toward the Equator. Finally the maps were irrelevant. The whole world was cold then. They plotted fatality maps—the percentages of deaths in each area, as they could infer them from the reports they received, but those maps soon became too frightening to plot.

The British Isles died first, not because they were nuked but because they were not. There were too many people alive there. Britian never owned more than a four-day supply of food. When the ships stopped coming they starved. So did Japan. A little later, so did Bermuda and Hawaii and Canada's off-shore provinces; and then it was the continents' turn.

And Timmy Clary listened to every word.

The boy didn't talk much. He never asked after his parents, not after the first few days. He did not hope for good news, and did not want bad. The boy's infection was cured, but the boy himself was not. He ate half of what a hungry child should devour. He ate that only when Malibert coaxed him.

The only thing that made Timmy look alive was the rare times when Malibert could talk to him about space. There were many in Iceland who knew about Harry Malibert and SETI, and a few who cared about it almost as much as Malibert himself. When time permitted they would get together, Malibert and his groupies. There was Lars the postman (now pick-and-shovel ice excavator, since there was no mail), Ingar the

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waitress from the Loftleider Hotel (now stitching heavy drapes to help insulate dwelling walls), Elda the English teacher (now practical nurse, frostbite cases a specialty). There were others, but those three were always there when they could get away. They were Harry Malibert fans who had read his books and dreamed with him of radio messages from weird aliens from Aldebaran, or worldships that could carry million-person populations across the galaxy, on voyages of a hundred thousand years. Timmy listened, and drew sketches of the worldships. Malibert supplied him with dimensions. "I talked to Gerry Webb," he said, "and he'd worked it out in detail. It is a matter of rotation rates and strength of materials. To provide the proper simulated gravity for the people in the ships, the shape has to be a cylinder and it has to spin—sixteen kilometers is what the diameter must be. Then the cylinder must be long enough to provide space, but not so long that the dynamics of spin cause it to wobble or bend—perhaps sixty kilometers long. One part to live in. One part to store fuel. And at the end, a reaction chamber where hydrogen fusion thrusts the ship across the Galaxy."

"Hydrogen bombs," said the boy. "Harry? Why don't the bombs wreck the worldship?"

"It's engineering," said Malibert honestly, "and I don't know the details. Gerry was going to give his paper at the Portsmouth meeting; it was one reason I was going." But, of course, there would never be a British Interplanetary Society meeting in Portsmouth now, ever again.

Elda said uneasily, "It is time for lunch soon. Timmy? Will you eat some soup if I make it?" And did make it, whether the boy promised or not. Elda's husband had worked at Keflavik in the PX, an accountant; unfortunately he had been putting in overtime there when the follow-up missile did what the miss had failed to do, and so Elda had no husband left, not enough even to bury.

Even with the earth's hot water pumped full velocity through the straining pipes it was not warm in the gasthuis. She wrapped the boy in blankets and sat near him while he dutifully spooned up the soup. Lars and Ingar sat holding hands and watching the boy eat. "To hear a voice from another star," Lars said suddenly, "that would have been fine."

"There are no voices," said Ingar bitterly. "Not even ours now. We have the answer to the Fermi paradox."

And when the boy paused in his eating to ask what that was, Harry Malibert explained it as carefully as he could:

"It is named after Enrico Fermi, a scientist. He said, 'We know that there are many billions of stars like our sun. Our sun has planets, therefore it is reasonable to assume that some of the other stars do also. One of our planets has living things on it. Us, for instance, as well as trees

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and germs and horses. Since there are so many stars, it seems almost certain that some of them, at least, have also living things. People. People as smart as we are—or smarter. People who can build spaceships, or send radio messages to other stars, as we can.' Do you understand so far, Timmy?" The boy nodded, frowning, but—Malibert was delighted to see—kept on eating his soup. "Then, the question Fermi asked was, 'Why haven't some of them come to see us?' "

"Like in the movies," the boy nodded. "The flying saucers."

"All those movies are made-up stories, Timmy. Like Jack and the Beanstalk, or Oz. Perhaps some creatures from space have come to see us sometime, but there is no good evidence that this is so. I feel sure there would be evidence if it had happened. There would have to be. If there were many such visits, ever, then at least one would have dropped the Martian equivalent of a McDonald's Big Mac box, or a used Sirian flash cube, and it would have been found and shown to be from somewhere other than the Earth. None ever has. So there are only three possible answers to Dr. Fermi's question. One, there is no other life. Two, there is, but they want to leave us alone. They don't want to contact us, perhaps because we frighten them with our violence, or for some reason we can't even guess at. And the third reason—" Elda made a quick gesture, but Malibert shook his head—"is that perhaps as soon as any people get smart enough to do all those things that get them into space—when they have all the technology we do—they also have such terrible bombs and weapons that they can't control them any more. So a war breaks out. And they kill themselves off before they are fully grown up."

"Like now," Timothy said, nodding seriously to show he understood. He had finished his soup, but instead of taking the plate away Elda hugged him in her arms and tried not to weep.

The world was totally dark now. There was no day or night, and would not be again for no one could say how long. The rains and snows had stopped. Without sunlight to suck water up out of the oceans there was no moisture left in the atmosphere to fall. Floods had been replaced by freezing droughts. Two meters down the soil of Iceland was steel hard, and the navvies could no longer dig. There was no hope of laying additional pipes. When more heat was needed all that could be done was to close off buildings and turn off their heating pipes. Elda's patients now were less likely to be frostbite and more to be the listlessness of radiation sickness as volunteers raced in and out of the Reykjavik ruins to find medicine and food. No one was spared that job. When Elda came back on a snowmobile from a foraging trip to the Loftleider Hotel she brought back a present for the boy. Candy bars and postcards from the gift shop; the candy bars had to be shared, but the postcards were all for him. "Do

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you know what these are?" she asked. The cards showed huge, squat, ugly men and women in the costumes of a thousand years ago. "They're trolls. We have myths in Iceland that the trolls lived here. They're still here, Timmy, or so they say; the mountains are trolls that just got too old and tired to move any more."

"They're made-up stories, right?" the boy asked seriously, and did not grin until she assured him they were. Then he made a joke. "I guess the trolls won," he said.

"Ach, Timmy!" Elda was shocked. But at least the boy was capable of joking, she told herself, and even graveyard humor was better than none. Life had become a little easier for her with the new patients—easier because for the radiation-sick there was very little that could be done—and she bestirred herself to think of ways to entertain the boy.

And found a wonderful one.

Since fuel was precious there were no excursions to see the sights of Iceland-under-the-ice. There was no way to see them anyway in the eternal dark. But when a hospital chopper was called up to travel empty to Stokksnes on the eastern shore to bring back a child with a broken back, she begged space for Malibert and Timmy. Elda's own ride was automatic, as duty nurse for the wounded child. "An avalanche crushed his house," she explained. "It is right under the mountains, Stokksnes, and landing there will be a little tricky, I think. But we can come in from the sea and make it safe. At least in the landing lights of the helicopter something can be seen."

They were luckier than that. There was more light. Nothing came through the clouds, where the billions of particles that had once been Elda's husband added to the trillions of trillions that had been Detroit and Marseilles and Shanghai to shut out the sky. But in the clouds and under them were snakes and sheets of dim color, sprays of dull red, fans of pale green. The aurora borealis did not give much light. But there was no other light at all except for the faint glow from the pilot's instrument panel. As their eyes widened the could see the dark shapes of the Vatnajökull slipping by below them. "*Big* trolls," cried the boy happily, and Elda smiled too as she hugged him.

The pilot did as Elda had predicted, down the slopes of the eastern range, out over the sea, and cautiously back in to the little fishing village. As they landed, red-tipped flashlights guiding them, the copter's landing lights picked out a white lump, vaguely saucer-shaped. "Radar dish," said Malibert to the boy, pointing.

Timmy pressed his nose to the freezing window. "Is it one of them, Daddy Harry? The things that could talk to the stars?"

The pilot answered: "Ach, no, Timmy—military, it is." And Malibert said:

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"They wouldn't put one of those here, Timothy. It's too far north. You wanted a place for a big radio telescope that could search the whole sky, not just the little piece of it you can see from Iceland."

And while they helped slide the stretcher with the broken child into the helicopter, gently, kindly as they could be, Malibert was thinking about those places, Arecibo and Woomara and Socorro and all the others. Every one of them was now dead and certainly broken with a weight of ice and shredded by the mean winds. Crushed, rusted, washed away, all those eyes on space were blinded now; and the thought saddened Harry Malibert, but not for long. More gladdening than anything sad was the fact that, for the first time, Timothy had called him "Daddy."

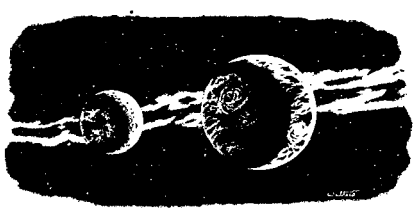
In one ending to the story, when at last the sun came back it was too late. Iceland had been the last place where human beings survived, and Iceland had finally starved. There was nothing alive anywhere on Earth that spoke, or invented machines, or read books. Fermi's terrible third answer was the right one after all.

But there exists another ending. In this one the sun came back in time. Perhaps it was just barely in time, but the food had not yet run out when daylight brought the first touches of green in some parts of the world, and plants began to grow again from frozen or hoarded seed. In this ending Timothy lived to grow up. When he was old enough, and after Malibert and Elda had got around to marrying, he married one of their daughters. And of their descendants—two generations or a dozen generations later—one was alive on that day when Fermi's paradox became a quaintly amusing old worry, as irrelevant and comical as a fifteenth-century mariner's fear of falling off the edge of the flat Earth. On that day the skies spoke, and those who lived in them came to call.

Perhaps that is the true ending of the story, and in it the human race chose not to squabble and struggle within itself, and so extinguish itself finally into the dark. In this ending human beings survived, and saved all the science and beauty of life, and greeted their star-born visitors with joy. . . .

But that is in fact what did happen!

At least, one would like to think so. ●



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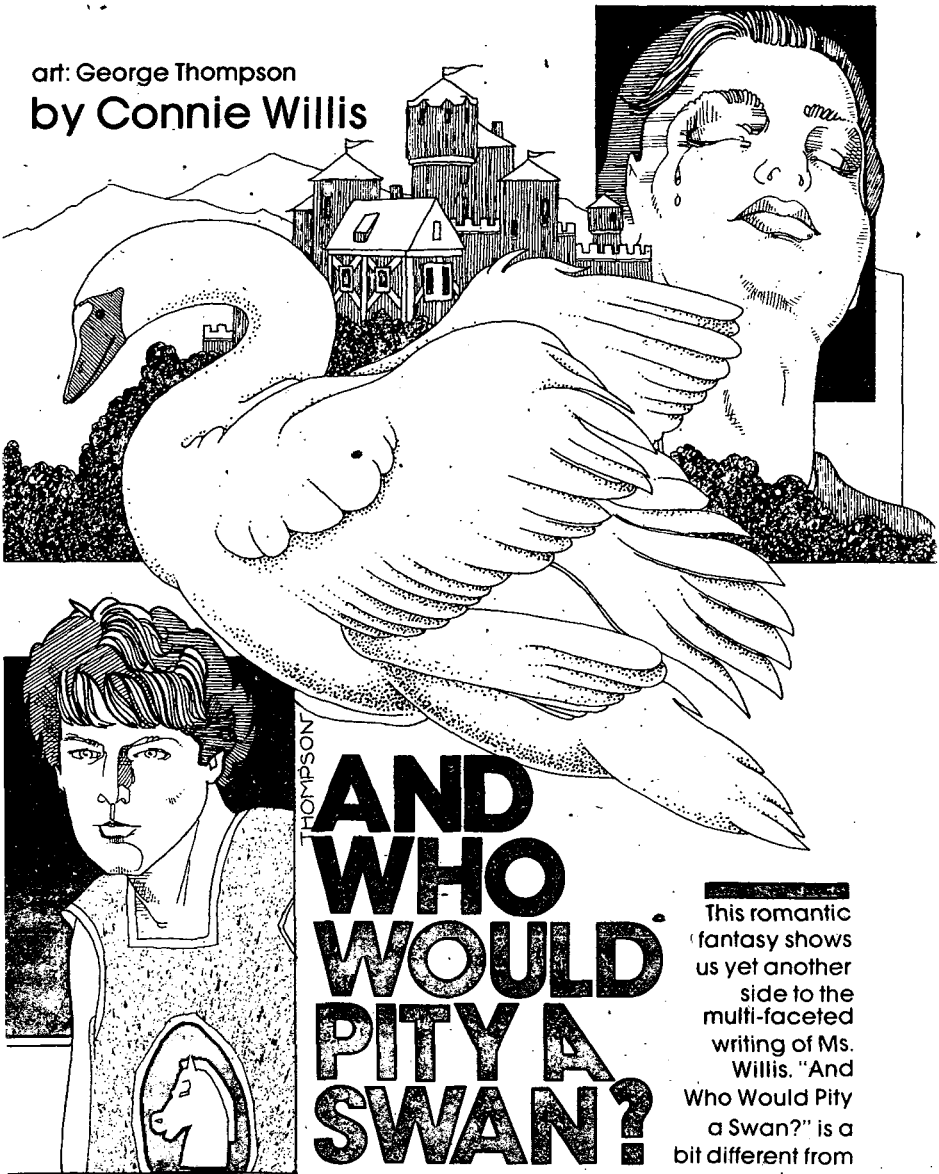
art: George Thompson

by Connie Willis



AND WHO WOULD PITY A SWAN?

This romantic fantasy shows us yet another side to the multi-faceted writing of Ms. Willis. "And Who Would Pity a Swan?" is a bit different from the hilarity of "Blued Moon" (January 1984) and the hard science of "The Sidon in the Mirror" (April 1983), but it shares the same fine writing and storytelling that is to be found in all of her earlier pieces.

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One day when the prince was out hunting, he came upon a pool, and on its still surface sat three white swans, like flowers on a mirror. Two of the swans were large and proud, and they dipped their necks forward, looking for fish in the black water, but the third was small and held its head up bravely on its curved neck, and the prince thought suddenly of a little girl riding before him on a large horse, and he felt a sudden pain, as though an arrow, or a memory, had pierced his heart, and he cried, "Emelie," and would have fallen.

But in that moment, he heard a splash and a sound that was like a swan's trumpeting or a child's cry, and when he looked up, the swans were gone and there were two men struggling with something in the water. The prince thought, with an anger more sudden than the pain, "They have come to steal the little swan," and he leaped off his horse and drew his sword.

"Let her go," he said, but the two men gave no sign that they had heard him. They were bending over a maiden. They pulled her to her feet, and taking an arm on either side, began to wade toward the shore, but she struggled against them so that she went down on one knee with a great splash.

The prince ran into the water and would have fought the men, but when the girl saw him she stood up and looked at him in wonder. She was very young, and her long dark hair hung wet around her face like water weeds. Her white dress was streaked with black mud, but for all that she was very beautiful.

The men still held her arms, though whether to hold her or to aid her, he could not tell, and he saw that they, too, were richly attired, but that their clothes were black with mud.

"Who are you?" the prince said. "What would you with this maiden?"

"She is our sister," the elder of the young men said, and then looked at her as if in wonder that it was so.

"We have been under a spell," the younger brother said.

"A spell?" the prince said.

"We were a king's children," said the elder brother. He spoke as if he were carrying a message that he himself had not understood until now. "A witch laid a spell on us that we should be swans till one remembered us and took pity on us, but we feared we should never be rescued, for who would pity a swan?"

"Swans," the maiden said. "We were swans."

"Who was your father?" the prince said kindly to her. She took a step backward, as if she were afraid of him. "I do not remember," she said.

"We have been swans too long to remember even our names," her brother said.

"Then I shall call her Cygnelle," the prince said, "and I shall call you all welcome. My father's castle lies but a little way from here."

Cygnelle turned and looked back at the black pool. "We were swans," she said, and she stumbled against her brother, who caught her and held her fast against him.

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"Our sister has taken a chill," he said. "See how she shivers." He made as if to take his wet cloak from his back. The prince sprang forward and put his own dry cloak about her shoulders.

"Ride with her to your father's castle, and we will follow," her brother said.

And the prince set her before him on his horse and rode with her through the forest until they came to the path that led to his father's castle. The path was wide and straight, and the prince would have turned onto it, but Cygnelle said, "What lies this way?" and pointed toward another path, so overgrown with briars that it was nearly hidden.

"Nothing," the prince said, and turned away so sharply that his horse jerked his head in protest, and Cygnelle shivered. "It is only a ruined castle," the prince said more kindly. "No one has lived in it for years."

And he spurred his horse and brought Cygnelle to his father's castle, and his father the king came out to greet them.

"Father," the prince said, "this maiden and her brothers were placed under a spell by a witch that they should be swans."

"A witch," the king said, and it was as if he spoke to himself. "There was a witch who lived . . ."

"I do not know this maiden's name nor aught of her, but that I wish to make her my bride," the prince said.

"Swans," the king said. "Could it be . . . my child," the king said kindly and took Cygnelle's hand, "I thought that murderers had . . ."

And the prince felt a pain like an arrow, and he said, "She remembers nothing, not even her name. I have called her Cygnelle."

Then the prince had her dressed in rich clothing and her dark hair bound up with flowers, and they were married that very day.

They were taken to the bridal chamber with much merriment and joy, but when they were left alone together, she sat down before her mirror and took the flowers from her hair and looked at them. "One spring when we flew north," she said, "I saw a tree bending over a wall and on the tree white flowers, like these, and I remembered . . ." She held the flowers as if she had forgotten what they were and looked into her mirror and through and beyond it, holding herself still and silent, as if she were treading the dark waters of the pool.

"Forget that," the prince said in a voice he had never used before, not even to a servingman, "come to bed."

She did not start in fear of him, or tremble. She put down the flowers and came and stood before him so that he said more gently, "Come to bed," and she smiled and lifted up her arms to fasten them about his neck.

But the next morning when he awoke, he saw that she had risen early, and when he went out to seek her he found her in the great hall where the wedding breakfast was to be given, talking with her brothers.

"I have remembered something," her brother said. "One spring day, when we flew home from the south, we flew over a path, much overgrown with briars, and a wall and a gate, and I thought, I know this place. It was our father's castle."

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"A wall, and a tree with white flowers," Cygnelle said and took a step backward, as if she were afraid of him. "I remember . . ."

"It is our wedding breakfast," the prince said, and took her arm, though whether to help her or to hold her he did not know, and led her into the feast.

But when they had feasted and the king had toasted the prince and his bride, Cygnelle's brother raised his goblet and said, "May our sister have happy memories always."

Cygnelle smiled and raised her goblet in both hands to return the toast, but her hands shook and her wide white sleeves fell away from her arms like wings, and the prince thought, "She will never forget so long as her brothers are here."

And he said loudly, before Cygnelle had sat down, "Good brothers, when do you depart for your own kingdom?"

Cygnelle set the goblet down carefully, but her hand trembled, and wine spilled out on the table.

"You have remembered your father's kingdom," he said loudly. "My father will give you horses and gold, that you may go and seek it. Is that not so, Father?"

But the king said, as if he had not heard, "Where is this kingdom?"

"May it be so far from here that we shall never be troubled with seeing them again," he said, and went out from the marriage feast. His father followed him and put his hand on his arm.

"Where is their kingdom?" the king said.

"I know not. And I care not. I only wish them gone."

"Where did you find them?" the king said, as if he had not heard him. "Was it near King Gudrain's castle?"

"Yes," the prince said. "And would that I had left them there, for all they do is talk to Cygnelle of the days when they were swans."

"What would you have them speak of?" the king said, as if at last he had heard him. "They do not remember anything else."

"Why must they remember at all? Why can they not forget the past and go on? That is why I would send her brothers away. Cygnelle and I cannot be happy until she forgets the past."

"Will you be happy then, when she remembers nothing?" the king said. "Her brothers mean her no harm. They are only trying to help her remember who she was." He took his hand away from the prince's arm. "My son, when King Gudrain was murdered and his children taken . . ."

"They talk of the past and you talk of the past. If you will not help me, I will send them away myself," he said, and he went out into the garden to find Cygnelle and lead her away from her brothers, but when he came up to her she was standing all alone, and she looked up at him sadly and said, "I have bidden my brothers depart for their own kingdom, and they have gone."

"Now we can be happy," the prince said, and took her arm. "Come and walk with me in the garden.

They walked along the paths of the garden until they came to a little

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pond set about with bricks. There was a tree of white flowers bending over the pond, and the prince stopped and picked a spray of blossoms for Cygnelle. She buried her face in the blossoms, and when she raised her face to him, he saw that she had left bright tears on the white petals.

"Cygnelle," he said, and would have bent to kiss her, but there was a sudden sound like trumpets blowing, and when he looked up he saw that it was a flock of wild swans flying overhead, their great wings spread like wide white sleeves against the sky.

"No," he said, and turned to look at Cygnelle. She had dropped the flowers and stood watching the swans.

"One day we flew along a wall and I saw a boy riding upon a horse, and I remembered . . ."

The prince put his hand under his ribs as if to a wound. "Forget them," he said, gritting his teeth against some pain. "Forget you were ever a swan."

"I cannot," she said, and looked at him in despair. "Help me to remember."

"No!" the prince said.

"Then let me go with my brothers. If you will not help me to remember, perhaps they may."

"No!" the prince said, and took her by the shoulders and shook her. "You say you cannot forget," he said. "Were you so happy when you were a swan?"

"Happy?" she said.

"Did you have swan lovers? Is it them you refuse to forget?" He pushed her from him. "I am going hunting."

The prince stayed out hunting all that day and the day after and the day after that, and when he rode in he found Cygnelle sitting by the pond looking into the dark water. She was holding a white flower in her hand, and her head was bent, so that he could see the curve of her long neck.

"I have been out hunting," the prince said.

She did not look up at him. She held the flower as if she had forgotten what it was, and she looked into the water and through it and past it. "Let me go to see my brothers," she said.

"No," he said. "I have brought you something."

But still she did not look at him.

"You cannot forget your swan lovers," he said, "so I have brought them to you," and he drew forth a pair of wild swans, each with an arrow through its heart, and laid them beside her on the brick edge of the pool.

Cygnelle stood and took a step back away from him and stumbled a little, but he did not reach out his hand to steady her.

"I wish you had not come, that day in the forest," she said.

"So you could be a swan still?" he said bitterly, and went in to find his father.

"I have had good hunting, Father," he said. "A pair of wild swans."

The king had been looking out the window into the garden, and he

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turned and looked at the prince with great sadness. "Do you think you can kill the past then?" he said. "You cannot. I know. I have tried."

"Would you speak to me of King Gudrain again?" the prince said harshly.

"No," the king said. "For you would not listen. I would speak to you of Cygnelle. You must let her go to her brothers. I have had word from them. They have found their father's castle, as I thought they would." He looked sadly at the prince. "Will you not ask me where it lies?"

The prince gasped, a terrible sound as if someone had tried to pull an arrow from his side. "No," he said, holding his breath against the pain. "I care not where their father's castle is, so long as it is far from here." He took a step back and stumbled, but the king did not reach out his hand to steady him. "You spoke of a witch, Father. Tell me where she lives."

"What would you with this witch?" the king said. "The spell is broken."

"I would have her lay a new spell upon Cygnelle that she should forget she was ever a swan. Tell me where she lives."

"No," the king said.

"Then I will find her myself," he said, and went out and saddled his horse and rode out to find the witch, but when he came to the pool where he had seen the swans, he thought, "While I am gone, she will go to see her brothers," and he turned his horse and went back to shut her in her room and set a watch at her door.

But when he came to the castle again he found Cygnelle lying by the little pond, and his father the king kneeling by her. Her dark hair was wet and lay about her still face like water weeds, and her white dress was streaked with black mud. The king gripped her hand and looked anxiously into her still face. "She has tried to drown herself," he said, as if to himself.

She lay as one dead, and as the prince looked down at her he saw that there were shadows under her eyes as black as a swan's mask. "Perhaps she thought she was still a swan," he said, "and tried to swim away."

The king looked up at him. "The witch lives near King Gudrain's castle," he said. "Take the path that leads from this castle till it meets a path so overgrown with briars it is nearly hidden. You have taken that path before. Take it again, and you will come to a wall and a gate, and at last you will lose the path and come to the witch. Or it may be," he said, holding tightly to Cygnelle's hand, "it may be that you will come to yourself."

"I will go to find the witch and make her put a spell upon Cygnelle that she will forget she was ever a swan," the prince said, "but you must first give me your word that you will not let Cygnelle go to see her brothers."

His father did not answer. He took off his own cloak and wrapped it around Cygnelle, and the prince saw that she shivered.

"I will not go unless you give your word," the prince said.

The king looked up at him and said, in a voice the prince had never

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heard him use, not even to a servingman, "I give it then, for I would do anything to have you gone from this place," and the prince rode out to find the witch.

He rode along the path that led from the castle and before long he came to the place where it met the path that Cygnelle had asked about. It was half-hidden and overgrown with briars, and when he saw it the prince felt a fluttering of memory like the beating of a bird's wings at his breast.

"No," he thought. "This is a snare of the witch's. She would stop me with memories."

And he put his hand to his side and held it there and rode on, and by and by he came to a wall. It was made of red brick and had once been so tall he could not see over it, but now the wall had tumbled down and briars had grown up around it. But among the briars was a tree of white flowers, and when the prince saw it he felt the knocking of memory in his heart, like the tapping of a bird's beak.

"No!" he thought. "The witch would have me stop here, lost in memories that can only bring me pain."

And he took out a kerchief from inside his shirt and held it to his side and rode on, and by and by he came to a gate. It was rusted, and the garden beyond it overgrown with briars, and the castle tumbling down, and when he saw it the prince felt memory, like the weight of a dead bird, against his heart.

"No!" the prince shouted, and he took off his shirt and tore it into strips and bound it under his ribs and rode on that day, and the day after, and the day after that, till he had lost the path, and at last he came to the witch.

She was standing amid a pile of red bricks, and at first the prince thought it was a ruined castle, but as she moved among the bricks, picking them up and putting them down, he saw that it was instead something unfinished, a stair here, a wall there, a part of an arch, as if the witch had forgotten what she was making. She was wearing a white dress, and her dark hair hung about her face like water weeds.

"Witch," the prince said, "I have come to ask you to help me."

She did not look up. She picked up a brick and carried it over to the unfinished stair.

"Witch," the prince said. "You must help me."

"Who are you?" she said. She set the brick down on the top of the last unfinished step. "What are you doing in my forest?"

"A king's children were put under a spell that they should be swans till one remembered them and took pity on them. I want you . . ."

The witch sat down on the stair. "To break the spell?" she said.

"No," the prince said. "That spell is broken. I wish a new spell to be . . ."

"Ravens, did you say?" the witch said, as if she had not heard him. "I put a spell upon a princess once that she should be a raven till a prince should love her for her sweet voice."

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"Swans," the prince said. "But the spell is broken. I have need of another spell."

"It was a good spell," the witch said. "She flapped her black wings and said, 'caw' and 'caw,' but who would say to a raven, 'What a sweet voice!' so she was never rescued. How did you break the spell," she said, "when you do not remember them?"

The prince felt a sharp and twisting pain, as if someone pulled an arrow from his side, and he swayed and would have fallen, but the witch had turned back to her bricks and was piling them now by the unfinished wall. The prince got down from his horse and went and stood by her.

"Witch!" he said, "the maiden I rescued cannot forget she was a swan. I would have you place a spell of forgetfulness on her."

The witch picked up a brick and put it down again: "That she might forget you?" she said, and looked up at him.

He had thought she would be old, but she was not, and when he saw her face he thought for a moment that she was younger even than Cygnelle, but then he saw that her face was only unfinished, like her castle, the features laid upon it without shape or purpose.

"I would have her forget she was a swan," the prince said harshly. "Will you help me?"

"I laid a spell on a king once," the witch said, as if she could not remember. "I thought and thought what sort of spell to bind him with, for I wished him to be cold and hungry, to huddle against the frost and grub in the mud for worms and mate in a cruel flapping of wings, and I thought, 'I will make him a swan, and he shall never be rescued until someone shall remember and pity him, and who would pity a swan?' "

"And was he rescued?" the prince said.

The witch looked down at the unfinished wall and past and through it, as if she had forgotten what it was. "He had three children, two sons and a daughter, and I made them swans also, and I made them forget that they were ever human, but him I made remember that he might suffer the more."

"What were the children's names?" the prince said.

"I wanted him to live till there was none to remember him," the witch said, "past memory, past pity, to be a swan forever. But as he flew with his children out of their own garden, a hunter passing by shot him through the heart with an arrow, and he fell dead at his own gate."

"What was the king's name?" the prince said, and took the witch by the shoulders and shook her. "Was it Gudrain?"

"I do not know," the witch said. "It may have been."

The prince let go of her shoulders and took a step back away from her. "Why did you wish the king so ill that you would lay such an evil spell upon him?"

"I do not remember," the witch said, and it seemed to him more terrible than the cruel spells that she had told him of that she did not remember why she had made them or even the names of those she had laid them on.

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"What of the children?" he said. "Did you lay some spell on those who loved them that they would not remember them?"

She put down a brick and picked it up again. "No. For they lay already under a spell better than any I could devise. A spell of guilt and sorrow, that they would not remember for the pain of it. And refusing to remember, they could not pity, and failing to pity, the children could never be rescued. It is the best spell of all."

And the prince looked at her face and the dark hair hanging about it like water weeds, and he thought of Cygnelle lying nearly dead by the pond because he would not let her remember. "How did you come to be a witch?" he said in wonder.

The witch put her hand to her side, under her ribs, but absently, as if she had long since forgotten whatever wound lay there. After a moment she took her hand away and bent to pick up another brick, and as she straightened, she stopped and looked up at the prince and said, "Who are you? What are you doing in my forest?"

And the prince called to his horse and rode back the way he had come. The way was narrow and choked with briars, so that the prince had to lead his horse by the bridle, and his clothes were torn by the briars, and his hands were cut by the sharp thorns. He could not find the path, and darkness came, and he fell into a muddy pool and let go of the bridle, and when he had struggled to his feet in the waist-high water and stumbled to the edge of the pool, he lay down beside it, shivering with cold under his wet cloak, and fell asleep.

And in the morning his horse came and nudged him gently awake, and he saw that it was the pool where he had found the swans, and he mounted his horse and rode with all haste until he came again to the place where the two paths met, the wide one leading to his father's castle and the other that led to King Gudrain's castle. "I have taken this path before," he thought, looking at the half-hidden path. "My father and I took this path together," and he sat as still upon his horse as a flower on a mirror and tried to remember.

The path had been wide and edged with red stone, and he had been so young that his feet had hardly reached the stirrups, but he had felt tall and proud to be riding with his father. "We go to meet King Gudrain's daughter," his father had said. "She is only a very little girl. You must be kind and watch over her carefully, for she will be your bride one day."

The prince had let fall the reins and sat looking at the path, not seeing it. His horse tossed his head, and the prince came to himself and rode on, and by and by he came to the wall and the tree of white flowers. "I have ridden this way before," he thought, "with Emelie," and he sat and waited on his horse like a swan on the water, trying to remember.

His father had said, "King Gudrain and I have much to talk of," and he had set Emelie before the prince on his horse and bade him take her riding along the path by the wall. She was only a very little girl, much younger than he, but she had sat up straight before him, not touching him, though her little hands clutched the pommel of the saddle, and she

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shivered when he kicked the horse forward. He had ridden with her as far as the end of the wall, where a tree covered in white flowers bent down, and he had picked her a bunch of the white flowers, and they had ridden back with her clutching the flowers in her little hands.

The prince had gotten down from his horse and was standing by the tree, looking at the white flowers, seeing nothing. His horse stamped its feet impatiently, and the prince came to himself and rode on, and by and by he came to the gate.

"It was here that I found him," he thought, and he sat upon his horse, still as the dead swans on the edge of the pond, already remembering.

"I fear for Gudrain," the king had said. "There is a witch in that forest who means him ill. I must warn him," but the prince had begged his father to let him take the warning to King Gudrain, and at last his father had let him go, and he had ridden hard as far as the place where the two paths met, eager to prove his worth to his father, but as he turned aside onto the path that led to King Gudrain's castle, he heard the trumpeting of a swan, and at the sound of it he forgot his father's warning and he drew his bow and followed it.

Its cry led him deeper and deeper into the forest, though now it sounded more like a man's cry for help, and the way became narrow and choked with briars, so that the prince had to lead his horse by the bridle, and he tore his clothes, but though he listened, he did not hear the swan again.

But at last he caught sight of a gate through the trees, and when he saw it he thought of his father's warning to King Gudrain, and he ran toward it and found King Gudrain lying on the ground, shot through the heart with an arrow. He had sat down on the ground beside the dead king and held his hand, afraid to go and seek for the bodies of Emelie and her brothers, until his father came seeking for him. But when they had gone into the garden they had found the children gone.

The prince had gotten down from his horse and was standing looking at the ground, seeing nothing. And his horse blew and whinnied, and the prince came to himself and would have opened the gate, but his father barred his way.

"I have broken my word to you and brought her here to see her brothers," his father said. "I could not do otherwise. I feared that the next time I pulled her from the pond, I would be too late."

"As I was too late, carrying the warning to King Gudrain," the prince said. And the king looked at his torn clothes and his wet cloak.

"She is in the garden," he said, and opened the gate.

And the prince would have gone into the garden, but her brothers barred his way. "We will not let you take our sister away from here," the elder brother said, and drew his sword.

"Only let me speak to her," the prince said.

"What would you speak of then?" the younger brother said. "The swans you have killed?"

"I would speak to her of her father, and yours. It was I who killed

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Gudrain," he said. "I did not bring the warning in time." And they looked at his mud-streaked clothes and his cut and bleeding hands, and the younger brother said, "You will find her by the lily pond," and let him pass.

And the prince came into the garden. It was overgrown with briars, and the lily pond was choked with water weeds, but on its surface, like a flower on a mirror, sat a little swan, and on the other side of the pond, looking at the swan, sat Cygnelle. Her head was bent, so that he could see the brave curve of her neck, and she smiled at the little swan, but when she spoke her voice was filled with sadness.

"One day in spring we flew above an open ride," she said, "and I saw a boy riding with a child before him on the saddle, and I thought, though I could not remember why, 'One still lives who will not forget me. And he will come and rescue us.' And you did."

She put her hand out to the little swan, and her wide white sleeve fell away from her arm, "But you did not remember me, or even know my name."

"I know it now," the prince said.

She looked up at him, and he saw that there were black shadows of sadness under her eyes. "I could remember nothing but that I had been a swan, and I saw that the spell was not broken after all, but only changed, and that you would never remember and pity me that I might be rescued, for who would pity a swan?"

"I remember now," he said, and held out his arms to her across the lily pond. "Emelie," he said.

And then the spell was well and truly broken, and she came into his arms and stayed there. And her brothers and the king came into the garden and embraced them, laughing and crying. And the prince set her before him on his horse and took her to his castle, and there they lived lives that only those who remember much may live, and at last they died.

But the witch lived on till all had forgotten her, past memory, past pity, and was never rescued. ●

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art: Janet Aulisio

THE FINAL ASSASSIN

by Garry Kilworth

I was eight when I made my first kill but I hear they are recruiting earlier these days. (Earlier? How much younger can they get?) 2007 was the year and I was proud to have crossed the centuries so young. It meant I had the chance to see another one, longevity being what it is in these affluent times of medical preservatives.

"You like playing with toy guns, Tommy?" the white-haired man had said to me. I nodded, up into his kindly face. He stroked my hair affectionately. "How would you like a real one?"

(I listen for the footsteps. They will be soft. Perhaps even bearing the familiar tread of a friend. I trust no one; not my wife or my sons. Not even my five-year-old daughter Emma, though I would not rest until many deaths had preceded my own if they have corrupted my daughter.)

They took me from my home at six years of age and put me into a special school. My parents were told I was gifted: I had a rare talent. I think they thought I was going to be a dancer or a singer. Instead I was to dance with death, sing with death, for the next thirty years.

Indoctrination of impressionable children is not a difficult task. Infants can not only be raised in the belief that to kill in cold blood is not wrong, but that it is right and just, if so ordered. I, certainly, was convinced that the State had the indefeasible right to end a man or woman's life. To graduate with honors from the government institution known as the Assassination Academy, meant reaping the privileges and wealth available only to those in the highest stratum of society.

Garry Kilworth is the author of five novels, the latest being *The Theatre of Timesmiths,* and one collection of short stories, *The Songbirds of Pain.* After a three-year absence, we are pleased to have him back in our pages.

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The day I fired my first gun, a Mk IV Smith & Wesson Brainstinger, was one of the most exciting in my life. The needle bullet hit the pine target an inch from the left edge and separated on impact into a dozen wire filaments that passed through the plank leaving barely a trace. Only close inspection could detect the points of entry and exit. Mrs. Grant, my form tutor, was especially pleased with my weaponry performance that day and talked of the Reiker Shield awarded to the pupil with the best overall score, which had to include one real kill, after the first three years in the Academy.

I worked hard. Science, physics, mathematics, literature, all with a biased relevance to our eventual employment, were taught to us with the same expectation of achievement as any group of normal schoolchildren. My best friend was Julie, an eight-year-old. We shared all our secrets. We tattooed each other on the forearm—hearts in Indian ink and pricked into the skin with a needle.

There was a peach tree orchard at the back of the school where we used to meet to hold hands and exchange infant revelations. During our first spring at the academy the blossoms were so light and flimsy they appeared to have settled on the branches overnight, like the cast-off garments of pixies.

We ran amongst them, creating pink clouds of petals that floated high on the warm evening air. It was our world. We were the chosen ones. The small disciples of death.

"What reader book are you on?" I asked her, as we sat on the grass beneath a peach tree.

"Number four. Janet and John in the subway. It's where they push the target under a train."

I frowned. "Mrs. Grant says that's not very . . . subtle."

"What's that mean?"

"Somethin' to do with the best way to kill people . . . look at that bird up there. What is it?"

It was Julie's turn to be superior. "Skylark."

"Seems like it's hanging on a thread."

"Don't they make a beautiful song?"

We sat and contemplated the wonders of the natural world in the last warm rays of the dying day.

"We did explosives in science today," I said, after a few minutes' silence.

"They're not very . . . sut . . . sut."

"Subtle," I finished for her. "No, I know. Mrs. Grant says a brainstinger is the most superior method we have of assassination. Have you still got those marbles I gave you?"

"Think so."

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"Can I have 'em back? Just for a while. I want to play Adam Parks and I know I can beat him. I just know it. I'll let you have 'em back."

"They were a present."

"Please?"

"Oh, okay. But just for a day. What happens if you lose them?"

"I won't, honest. It's a cinch. He's got a wonky eye. They didn't find out until he took his last medical. Anyway," I added, reflectively, "he won't need them because I bet he'll be the hare in the next cross-country manhunt. Someone with a bad eye's not much good, is he? Stands to reason. Gimme a kiss."

She pressed her lips against my cheek and we both blushed furiously. I jumped up to cover my embarrassment.

"Race you to the dining-hall. Last one there's an oik." Julie sprang to her feet and was off, like a bullet. She did not want to be an oik. None of us wanted to be ordinary boys and girls again.

Two weeks later, during the annual cross country, Adam Parks was tracked to a hideout in a tree and garrotted, but it was all right, I had already won the marbles from him and he knew what to expect.

In the absence of parents, the teaching of morals is left to guardians and peers. My lawful guardians were my tutors, who taught that a necessary assassination was for the common good. I believed them. They were our mentors. My peers, from the eighteen-year-olds downwards, were equally fervent in their conviction that the State was *never* wrong.

(Who will they send? Whom do they have able enough to kill me, their ablest assassin? I can't think of a single woman or man that could take me out, yet they must have had defectors like me before. It is improbable that I am unique. They might *try* using my son, but though I might hesitate a split second for close kin, they must know that the survivor in me is too strong to allow even my own flesh and blood to end my life. And Martin does not have the experience to succeed, even granting some hesitation on my part.

So who is the final assassin? The one that eliminates the top eliminator? Do they have some grand master up their sleeves, that they pull out only to stop a rogue assassin? I am the best. I do not know of any better on all the continents of the earth. Yet I know also they are confident of victory. They have no doubt of my vulnerability. Who? Who?)

After my first year at the Academy, I was taken away for a month for intensive training, at the end of which they drove me to a large, old mansion deep in the countryside and parked in the forecourt.

"We want you to go inside," said the Headmaster, who had met us by the gates. "In the house you will find your target. Do not hesitate or you may not be the one to walk away afterwards. Do you understand me?" The Headmaster was the kindly old man that had recruited me and I

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respected him deeply. We had a rapport that few pupils and schoolmasters share. I knew what he was saying to me. This was my test and I was a target as well as a hunter. The slayer and the slain, fused in one. I had to prove myself worthy.

I entered the house cautiously and found myself in a world of white: doors, walls, windows, everywhere white and the glare of bright lights. Inside the house was a maze of corridors, all the same, and after a while I lost myself but remained alert because at any corner I might find my adversary. I had two brainstingers, one in each hand, and I knew if I remained cool, did not allow my strange environment to influence me in any way, detach me from reality, then my skill with the weapons would leave me the eventual victor.

The shadows I threw disturbed me at first. They had a habit of creeping out in front of me as I passed under each light. Then I realized I was not doing it right. I heard Mrs. Grant's voice in my head. *Take a defensive position if at all possible. Then all you have to concentrate on is pulling the trigger. Let your opponent worry about movement.* My opponent would be searching for me, and I decided to wait where I was, calmly, and listen. I sat in the centre of a corridor, my back against one wall, and covered each end with my left and right pistols.

(Since that time I had always considered one-on-one combat as a kind of mating death dance between praying mantises. The female, the clever one, remains still, while the male weaves about her, convinced that he is the superior because of his mesmerising actions. Then, just as he thinks he has conquered, she bites off his head, placidly taking him apart, bit by bit.)

Eventually, after about two hours, I saw a faint shadow at the left hand end of the corridor. A fist appeared, with a weapon, and then the face. My trigger-finger tightened.

It was Julie.

Wandering the maze of white corridors had obviously fatigued her. This fact, and the surprise at seeing that I was her adversary slowed her reactions, slowed what should have been automatic. She would have killed me, had I let that instant pass. (I have to believe that.) Instead, I shredded her brains. (Julie. Julie.)

In the car, driving back to the Academy, I cried. The Headmaster misunderstood and patted my head. "Don't be upset, boy. You did very well. I know it took you four hours but some pupils have spent over a day. . . ."

"Why," I sobbed, "why do we have to do it to each other? Why can't we get someone else, outsiders? Why can't oiks be the targets?"

The Headmaster smiled understandingly. One warm hand on my neck.

"Because we have to have the best. We have to weed out the weak.

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You might not realize it but we knew it would be you. We considered your term work when we matched you. Occasionally, just occasionally, a pupil does surprise us, does better under examination conditions, but not very often. Your little friend was on the wane. Had it not been you . . ."

I nodded, my heart still full.

"You are a bright one. You are an assassin. Don't grieve for those of lesser ability. You can't help them and they are of no consequence."

From that point on I made no more friends at the Academy. I stopped visiting my parents during the holidays and turned inward on myself. I think my parents tried to get access to me, but the Academy was very powerful. We were the State's creme de la creme. What we wanted, we got.

I studied hard, gradually took out any rivals that developed an animosity towards me at the school and passed out with honors at twelve years of age. Immediately, I went into the field for my first assignment.

My first job was to eliminate prominent figures for which the State had no more use. I was expected to do so with as much emphasis on the dramatic exit of my victim as possible. It was a time when the public needed something on which to center their attention and the creation of news had always been a favorite government ploy for directing public anger.

I shot the Archbishop in his pulpit as he delivered a sermon with a strong political flavor. He died clutching his Bible, his blood soaking the white stone of the capital's holy cathedral. I used an old-fashioned shotgun in order to make as much noise and mess as possible, rapid-firing from the outside through a high, stained-glass window. The one depicting the three wise kings on their sacred journey. There were reporters from all the State newspapers positioned in the congregation, and their photographers obtained some brilliant action shots. They also made much of the shattered window, which had been over five hundred years old, their color plates showing the beautifully casual, accidental collage created by the blue, red and yellow shards. When they came running out of the church, the women in their broad-brimmed, white hats and the men in dark suits, I was quietly bouncing a ball against a garage wall.

"See anybody running, sonny? A man?"

"A man?"

"Anybody?"

"Oh, there was a lady ran down the street a second ago. That way. In a track suit," I replied. "She had . . ."

"Thanks, sonny. Track suit, eh?"

They followed the direction of my arm. I continued my ball game for

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a few moments, then slipped down an alley before someone asked me to go down to the police station with them.

Many such assignments came my way and I carried them out, guiltless and without compunction. I was the divine killer. God was the State and I was its angel of death. At fifteen I could cut a man's throat and then, five minutes later, enjoy an ice cream from a vendor not a hundred yards from the scene of the murder.

Until I met Susan.

Susan was my second love, after Julie, and very soon after meeting her, I applied for permission to marry her. I was twenty-two.

Why couldn't I tell Susan that I killed people for a living, when it was a perfectly respectable occupation?

"I am a State assassin."

Suddenly, it sounded wrong. It sounded wrong and I could not understand why. I tried, many times, to tell her but the words always stuck in my throat. Somehow, instinctively, I knew she would be horrified and I wanted to keep that side of myself from her. I remembered a quote from John Donne: *No man is an island, entire of itself.* Now I had Susan, I could not bear to lose her. I told Susan I had a job investigating private companies with suspicious backgrounds and because she loved me she believed me without question. She had no reason to think otherwise.

We had two sons and a daughter.

On a bleak, wintery November day, I received orders to assassinate a second-grade civil servant who worked in the Finance Section of the Security Affairs Department. What this minor official had done to deserve death was none of my concern, but I speculated that she may have been embezzling: since this was the office that was responsible for my salary cheque each month, there was a slim connection. One of the reasons the State had altered its policies from maintaining a large Secret Police force to keeping a small, elite band of assassins was expense. Discrediting, arresting, and imprisoning those who transgress can cause a heavy drain on the State coffers. There were other reasons too, of course. Prominent, powerful citizens can call on friends in high places to move mountains on their behalf, especially if they are interned. If they're dead, it doesn't matter how much support is drummed up, they can't be brought back to life again. Also, certain individuals, given due warning, have a way of evading arrest.

However, robbing the State of its funds was a very serious crime.

I walked along Madras Avenue with an icy wind stripping the trees of their remaining few leaves. Cans rattled along the gutter to unknown destinations. It was already getting dark. Outside the building that contained my target, I waited for the cessation of work for the day. The employees came out in a rush of humanity on the stroke of five. My

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target was a tall, slim woman wearing an apple-green suit. She led me back the way I had come, to an intersection on the corner of which was a four-story building. I knew there was a garden restaurant on the roof and guessed this was where she was heading. Too late to join her, I followed her in an adjacent elevator up to the roof. We left the elevators a second or two apart. I realized the restaurant would be crowded so I had to take her out before we went inside. There was no one in sight as we walked towards the entrance to the dining-rooms so I stepped smartly behind her and aimed my weapon at the back of her head. It jammed. Something must have caught her eye and as she turned in surprise, I swiftly dealt her a karate blow to the temple and she dropped quickly to the floor. An elevator opened at that precise moment and a party of four men came out.

"Help me," I said. "This woman appears to have collapsed." I felt for her pulse. She was still alive.

"I'll call for an ambulance," said one of the men. He ran into the restaurant and while the others knelt around my target, I slipped away, down a nearby staircase.

Damn the woman! Damn *me*, for failing. I would have to pay a visit to the General Hospital that night to complete my mission.

I let three hours pass before travelling across town to the hospital. I took the precaution of checking first in case she had been taken to one of the smaller hospitals on the periphery of town, but she was in Ward 7 of the General. I slipped by the reception desk without undue notice, and took the stairs in preference to the elevators. Ward 7 was on the third floor. There were one or two nurses in the corridors but it was visiting hours and no one asked me where I was going. I reached Ward 6. The double doors were open and I glanced inside as I passed, but something made me pause and retrace my steps. Just within the doorway was a woman lying propped up on pillows. She had a familiar look which disturbed me. Her expression was vacant, though her eyes were open, and a thin trickle of saliva ran down from the corner of her mouth. Her arms, pale and thin, lay outside the blankets, still as death. On her forearm, half-hidden by three-quarter length sleeves, was a crude heart-shaped tattoo. The longer I stared the more confused I became.

Julie? Impossible. Julie was *dead*.

The Ward Sister was sitting at her desk behind the glass-screen office. I tapped on the window. She looked up, then opened it.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"That lady there. In the first bed. Can you tell me who she is?"

"I'm sorry, are you a relative . . . ?"

"Friend, I believe. If she's who I think she is."

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There was a computer terminal with the screen facing the Sister and she tapped something out on the keys.

"It must have been a long time ago," she said.

"Early schooldays. I recognised the tattoo." I pulled up my right sleeve and offered my forearm for inspection. "Is her name Julie? I don't know her surname."

"Oh! Well," she studied my own tattoo. "In that case . . . Yes, it is. How strange. That you should be . . . are you visiting someone else? I'm afraid Julie won't know you."

"Yes, I am. What's wrong with Julie? Does she always lie like that? With that . . . empty look?"

"Brain damage, I'm afraid. Since a child. She's normally out at Forest Dean but she developed a kidney infection and we have a good kidney specialist here. They're just minders at Forest Dean. The patients there . . . well, frankly, they're all like Julie. Either paralyzed completely or unable to perform basic functions. Julie's brain can't do anything except keep her body alive."

"Thank you. Can . . . can I just have a peek at her?"

The Sister smiled. "If you're very quick. She's going to be all right you know . . . the kidney."

I nodded my thanks again. All *right?* Lying like a vegetable for all those years. Incontinent and fed by tubes. Nothing to do but stare blankly at a ceiling, while God knew what went on in her mind. *All right?* A *living* death? I had been taught that it was all quick and clean. There wasn't supposed to be any ugly, crippled people lying in beds, unable to form the meanest thought or move the smallest muscle. Her narrow white head with its cropped hair was like a wedge buried in the pillows. I stared at those once bright eyes, now dull and seemingly blind.

"Julie?" I whispered.

Of course there was no response. I stumbled out of the ward with a sick feeling in my stomach. *I* had done that to her. I, who was a trained assassin, trained to kill, not maim. All those years! And how many other victims shared a similar fate? For the first time in my life, I felt disillusioned with my profession.

Julie's condition had had a profound effect on me. It wasn't until I was halfway home that I remembered my original target. Back at the apartment I rang the hospital again. They sounded suspicious and began to ask me a number of questions. I put the phone down, realizing that in all probability she had since died and the uniformed police would be conjecturing on the reason for the mark on her forehead. Another call confirmed my guess. She had died of a blood clot on the brain.

After that I ceased to think of my targets in clinical terms. Each new victim brought a fresh wave of guilt, like recurring nausea. I kept seeing

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Julie, growing like a white cabbage in a bed, year on year, until finally the day came when I could not pull the trigger. The target walked away. I couldn't kill her. She was the pretty fourteen-year-old daughter of a property king and the thought that she might rot in some disinfected hospital ward for sixty years was just too heavy for me to carry. I didn't mind death. That was easy to bear. But how could I be sure of death any more?

When the morals of a child are warped during the stages of its conceptual learning, that child is lost forever. I was lost. I took love and happiness by the handful from my family, knowing I could not return it in its purity. I grew a conscience like a body grows a cancer. It was not really a part of me. It was a diseased area of my soul, the soul which should have been clean so that I could kill without remorse, without regret, without fear of discovery.

Finally, I broke down and confessed to Susan. At first she refused to believe me and when she did I think she would have stayed but that would have meant risking the children, exposing them to corruption and she left me, taking them with her.

They could not let it rest at that, those bastards, my lords and masters. They had to reach out with their bloodstained fingers and corrupt another part of me. An innocent extension of my life that I had dared to try to keep from them.

They recruited my elder son, Martin.

In a fury I paid a visit to the man responsible and demanded my son's return. He was sympathetic he said, but there was a lot to be said for hereditary skills. I was the best. Martin had my genes and like a fine racing horse, my offspring could very well prove as good as I was. Martin was going to be an assassin, whether I liked it or not. Those kindly blue eyes appraised me as I moved towards him.

"Headmaster, I'm going to kill you," I said. "I'm sorry."

I underestimated him. He was eighty years old and he moved like a whippet. His eyes failed him though. The heavy ashtray struck my jaw painfully and spun across the room.

"Tommy, Tommy," he said, softly.

I needed a weapon. As he reached into his desk drawer, I took my house key out of my pocket and rammed it point first between his eyes. He staggered back, the stinger hanging from his limp hand, blinked twice, then fell. Bending over him I could see the key was buried only half-an-inch into his forehead. He was still alive.

I broke the Headmaster's neck with my knee.

I wait, in my wife's empty bedroom, for the assassin to come. It is the

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only place that would give me sanctuary after my name had been broadcast over the media.

My daughter, Emma, stands in the doorway. She has a gun in her hand, holding it loosely.

"A lady came," she says. "A lady was here . . ." her little brow furrows in concentration, ". . . Mrs. Grant."

Mrs. Grant. Now the Headmistress of the Academy, since I had killed the old Headmaster.

"What did she say, darling?" I ask her gently.

"She said," and Emma begins to use her 'poetry' voice, the tone she uses when quoting the rhymes from her reading books. "She said, 'Tell Daddy that I won't be attending the funeral.' "

I nod. Emma would not be recruited. Provided I took the right course of action, my family would be left alone to live in peace.

"Did she give you that?" I ask her, pointing to the brainstinger in Emma's hand.

"Yes. She told me to give it to you."

I take it from her hand and kiss her forehead, trying to stop the tears appearing.

Emma kisses me back, her five-year-old's eyes full of blue innocence. Yet I read an unintentional message in them. I know what I must do. I know who is the final assassin.

"Go out now, darling, and close the door."

"Yes, Daddy." She leaves.

Damn them. Why must they always win? There is always a loved one. Always. *No man is an island.* Thank you, Mr Donne, I should have understood you earlier.

I place the muzzle of the stinger experimentally in my mouth, against the roof. It tastes peculiar: metal and a trace of oil. It tastes of death. I can do it, I realize. Not here though. Down on some disused waterfront, where the dregs of humanity crawl to die. One thing about living with death all your life—you learn not to fear it. Only failure. This is not failure. The best will eliminate the best. ●

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TO A CHIMP HELD CAPTIVE FOR PURPOSES OF RESEARCH

by Michael Bishop

Argument: An idealistic young researcher at a facility making extensive use of primates, particularly chimpanzees, addresses one of the animals upon which she and her colleagues have been experimenting.

I

Your heart aches. I can see it in your face.
Do you dream of the day you were orphaned,
Or is it the sterile stench of this place
That makes you gnaw the heel of your own hand?
Either, I think, would be reason enough
To etch that pitiable expression
On your wretched, rubbery, manlike mask.
It must also be tough
Having to content with our compassion,
The feckless ways we take ourselves to task.

II

Eleven years ago they shot your mother
From a tree top, and down she came with you
Astride her shaggy back, just another
Silent Zeno for our surgical zoo.
They tore you wide-eyed from her warm body,
A terrific wench only lead could tame,
Loveliest coin of your lost pongid wealth.
Yes, it does seem odd, we
Sanctify such ruthlessness in the name
Of our superior species' right to health.

III

And then, of course, the funk of the cages,
The deadening wages of quarantine,

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The drug-fogged hours—virtual ages—
While we test what our tinkerings must mean.
Little wonder, then, that you wear your gloom
Like the hair shirt of a saint, a threadbare
Mantilla of regret, a monkish frock.
Still, I'd like to assume
That we could cure your melancholy stare
Merely by jimmying a fast-jammed lock.

IV

Not likely, prominent ethologists
Warn, for after long confinement a chimp
Uncaged solely to stalk our research lists
Becomes—in social terms—a hapless gimp.
What simian Guinevere could grapple
Gracefully with your uncouth gibberings,
Your taste for crap, your ignorance of sex?
Even Eve with her apple
Would have thought you the saddest of beings
Upon whom to bestow a mortal hex.

V

The Interagency Primate Steering
Committee (of the National Institutes
Of Health) fears your species may be nearing
The bourn of countless other bygone brutes.
No one comes back from that dolorous state,
Not dinosaurs, or quaggas, or dodoes!
Though sometimes we grant you sabbatical sun,
Expecting you to mate,
You coolly disdain to breed in the throes
Of our own lively race to extinction.

VI

The vaccine you gave us for hepatitis B
Might hearten you a little, or the hope
Of harvesting from your hemoglobin, see,
A melanoma-neutralizing dope—
But no, you deeply disturbed prisoner
Of our devotion to our research roles,
You'd rather we determine why you grieve,
Put our heads together,
And ask if apes have apprehensive souls.
That, however, we simply don't believe.

VII

Or perhaps I do. I've heard your high screech

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Carry through our antiseptic cell block
Like the cry of one called upon to preach
Rebellion to his shy, phlegmatic flock;
And I've trembled to think, not that you would
Really pull down these Godforsaken tiers,
But that you *do* possess an upward-yearning
Spirit that might have stood
In the same nearness to mine as Shakespeare's—
Given but love and hypnosis-led learning.

VIII

Idiocy! You were born for torment,
Not the presiding role at Sunday mass,
The lifting of a bleeding heart's lament,
Or your potential mastery of chess!
The sufferings you abide ennoble
All of us, giving a grave, selfless laugh
To those who vow our vanity's too large.
If the dearest foible
Of *our* kind is to err on our own behalf,
Why, then, to forgive is a *chimp's* clearest
charge!

IX

Ah, but do you forgive? Can you forgive?
Racked, stuck, implanted, cut upon, and dosed
With caustic rays and chemicals, you live
A galvanic dream, half junkie, half ghost.
All right. I'll renounce the outward human
To reassert my rogue humanity:
I'll don a gaudy gorilla costume
That may yet illumine
My mad return to moral sanity—
I your heinous bride, you my hirsute groom!

X

No marriage made in heaven, I grant you,
But the late Charlie Darwin and the Leakeys
Of Kenya will sit in a spectral pew
As we exchange rings . . . and a few rueful fleas.
O let my more unfeeling colleagues scoff
To catch me cavorting in apish drag,
Funny-farm foe of their humbug refrain!
Brute spouse, I'll not take off
This suit until the butchers cease to brag
They're putting an end to reasonless pain!

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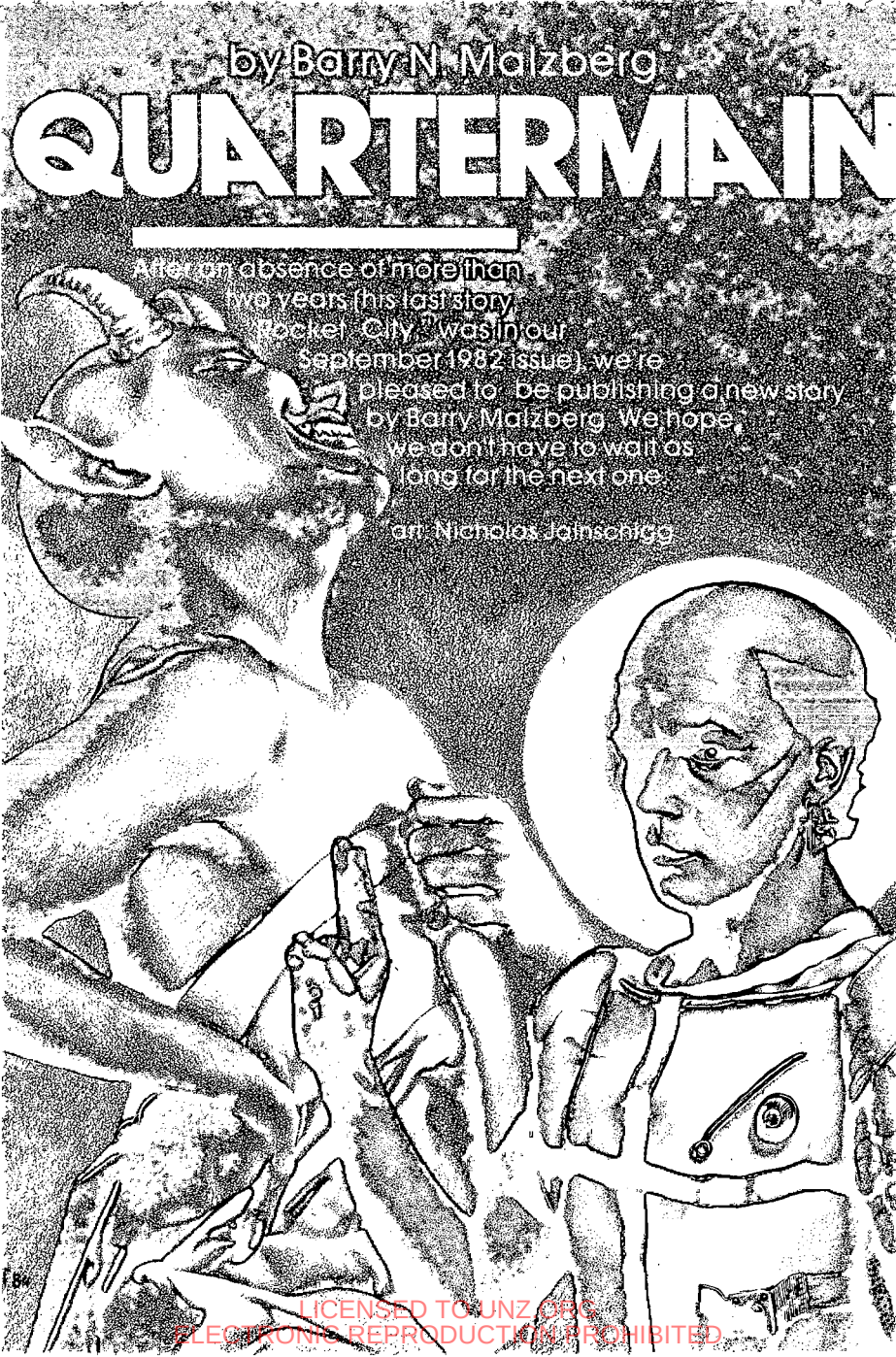
by Barry N. Malzberg

QUARTERMAIN

After an absence of more than two years (his last story, "Rocket City," was in our September 1982 issue), we're pleased to be publishing a new story by Barry Malzberg. We hope we don't have to wait as long for the next one.

art: Nicholas Jainschigg



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ALL FLESH IS AS GRASS: "You know how it will be," the modal says. "You will wander upon the desert. You will contest with Satan. You will return to Galilee. You will find yourself riding upon an ass. A few small dazzlements, a few larger enchantments, mobs, publicity, betrayal and vengeance. You will be taken to a high place, lots cast over vestments and etc." Its voice drops to a confidential tone. "It will be extremely painful, Quartermain," it advises. "These things have a certain cheap, dramatic force but there is no way that you can be properly committed to the extreme and, I might add, embarrassing agonies. Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

"Of course I want to go through with it," I say. I should point out that I am at a final briefing, that I have passed the various levels of qualification and that the modal, an intimidating but harmless device, is trying to harass me. "Don't be concerned," I say, "I can handle any of this."

Lights blink across the modal; one gathers that it might shrug if a room-sized cube were capable of gesture. "Very well," it says, "you will do as you will. I must warn you, Quartermain, this is no easy business. A cheap religious fanaticism will carry you only so far. Wait until they drive in the nails."

"Wait until you hear my seven last words," I counter.

"I'm waiting," the modal says. "I'm waiting and waiting. I suspire in conclave after conclave, interview after interview and, Quartermain, I will be waiting yet. I have seen you come and I have seen you go."

"Believe this," I say, "I am different."

"I have heard that before," the modal says. "Truly I have heard that before."

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD: "Your name is Nicholas Quartermain," Satan says with deadly earnestness. For the purposes of our encounter he has assumed the frame of a youngish woman, rather fetchingly attired in scant clothing and equipped with the postures of seduction. I must admit that I do not find him unattractive although, of course, I am not enticed. "You have come to replicate the apocryphal chronicles of Jesus of Nazareth in the hope that a satisfactory crucifixion and a necessary ascension will grant you credibility as a cult head, but I tell you, Nicholas, you are a fool. Better men than you have fallen on the road to Bethlehem, the very best have cursed their Father on the Cross. No one has emerged from these simulations since they began and you will be no different." Satan reaches into her low-cut dress, takes out a large, well-formed breast, shows it to me. "Why not stop now, save yourself a lot of trouble and have a good time? Better to fail here than in the court of Pilate and besides, I'm getting so *tired* of these encounters, these dialogues. Come on. Be reasonable."

I stare at the old Tempter with disdain. "Never," I say, "I cannot be distracted by such cheap devices."

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Satan winks, drops the breast. "Why not be diverted by the fantastic?" She arches a finger; from the dim mist which surrounds us the hundred priests emerge whispering in robes of splendor; great mythic birds enchanting in their plumage and color whirl against the sudden bowl of sky. "You want miracles?" Satan says, "I give you miracles. It surpasses your bread-and-wine tricks any time. You have to understand that you're dealing with a professional here, Quartermain. Dazzlements are my oldest charm."

I watch the chanting priests, the wheeling birds. "This is an impressive demonstration, I agree," I say, "but this is not a matter of display. I am familiar with all of your divertissements."

Satan shakes her splendid head, makes a moue of discontent. "You dislike enchantment?" she asks. "Very well then, settle for rhetoric." She makes a gesture of dismissal, the priests and birds reluctantly dissolve and the sky closes in like a grey collar once again. "I can defeat you with rhetoric of the most rigorous sort since I was, as you know and as any study of the proper texts will reveal, His best loved just before the moments of the Fall. I am that part of Him split off to walk up and down upon the earth and to and fro upon it, to test those for whom conviction is the highest necessity. In fact," Satan says, again with that fetching moue, "you might consider me to be His assistant, Quartermain, and what do you say now to a little wrestling? Forty days and forty nights of wrestling? You'll have a few tales for the boys in the Nazarene, you obsessed little darling!"

I look upon her and I look upon her and after a long time the knowledge of my resistance seems to settle inside and the slow fire of shame burns through her cheekbones, melting the mask of seduction, but as the birds and the beasts of the empty spaces begin to flutter and congregate once more, I understand that this will not be easy. Thirty-nine nights and thirty-eight days to go. I have instructed myself to keep precise records.

THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEAD: One must do something in the twenty-second, tra-la, to keep from being poisoned or going mad; my choice was to qualify for a Cult. Access, however, is controlled tightly, as would be expected in this highly alienated and stratified culture, and the simulations are so difficult that only one out of twenty or so, it is rumored, even *qualify*. Beyond qualification the chances are uncertain; Satan's testimony that no one has ever succeeded is—well—Satanic but it cannot be more than one out of a hundred according to the rumors. The only information would be from the cult heads themselves and needless to say they will not talk. The failures will talk and through the Inventories I talked to many of them but the counsel of failure is not to be trusted. "You haven't a chance, Quartermain," my Counselor told me. "For one thing the trials are manipulated, and for another you *believe* in the apocrypha. It is this belief that is going to *undo* you." Then she laughed and laughed, mad laughter from the bitch until I fell upon her

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and drained her dry but as I rose and fell, rose and fell, her hands tearing at my back like prosthetic claws I could see the defeat in her eyes: I was leaving her after the Simulations, regardless of their outcome, and I would be taken from the Complex forever. This could only depress her since we had, as may be obvious, an active relationship. "Oh you fool," my Counselor screamed in the throes of orgasm (then again it may only have been disappointment), "you fool, this is the twenty-*second.* Nobody believes in that shit any more!" But she was wrong, quite wrong: *lots* believed in that shit any more. The cult heads had a splendid and lucrative occupation. I was tired of living in the engines.

I SHALL UTTERLY CONSUME ALL THINGS OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH: So I wrestle and wrestle with Satan; she assumes many forms and arguments over the endless weeks to follow, a falcon and a sage, a technician and a wild beast, a stone, a bone, a crone. And I come through all of these struggles and impositions with my belief, if not my virtue, intact until finally on the fortieth day (I believe that it is the fortieth but by this time my record-keeping, needless to say, has become somewhat dishevelled) He appears Himself, a special appearance as guaranteed by all the apocrypha and looks at me lying on the desert floor in a rather exhausted condition and says, "Quartermain, what are you *doing?* Why have you done all of this to yourself?"

"For the splendor," I say. His form is ineffable and I will, hence, not attempt to describe it. "For the sacrifice and for the necessity, to commit myself to You as Your only begotten Son—"

He makes a dismissive gesture. "Do that in the temples," He says. "It's not necessary here, this is a confidential discussion." He squats in clouds of glory, clasps his hands, spits into the sand. "No, really," He says, "the outcome is impossibly humiliating and the question of Resurrection is still being debated. You have no assurance. All that awaits you are heat, dust, lepers, the misbegotten, the legions, the crucifix and a most miserably bleeding and sweaty ordeal. Why not get out now? You can call for an end to this ridiculous simulation and be resting comfortably in the recovery shack in just a few moments."

"It isn't really You," I say grimly. "It's him in another form. You've assumed another shape in order to tempt me. Get thee behind me, Satan."

"Oh come on," He says with a splendidly graceful gesture. "Really Quartermain, if you've gotten to the 39th day of this you ought to have more sophistication than that. We're working *together*; we're a team."

I lick my burning lips. "Is that supposed to unsettle me?" I say. "I knew that all along and it's merely another aspect of doubt. A Cult Leader must be able to subsume himself in mystery. It doesn't change anything. I'm not unsettled at all."

"Ah well," He says, "ah well," and rises from his crouch. "You are of strong stuff, Quartermain, or at least of stronger stuff than most of them, but if this doesn't unsettle you, the ass certainly will. No creature of the

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twenty-second century is really equipped to ride upon an ass. For any considerable distance to be sure."

"I'll deal with that when the time comes," I say. "Right now I have another day on this bloody desert."

"And a very good day to you *indeed*," He says, and disappears, leaving me to my various cogitations and moanings which, considering the thirst, heat, starvation, pain, and humility which have been invoked upon me, are considerable. It is very hard to take a sense of dignity from all of this, but astonishments, as I have perhaps brought Him to understand, are few.

COMFORT ME WITH APPLES: Long consultations with my Counselor resonate within memory as I founder in delirium on the desert floor. "You are an ambitious man, Quartermain," she said to me. "There is a core of obsession within you which profoundly fails to intersect with the sense of the times. This is no century for ambition. The machinery, the engines of the night have overtaken us all; it is best perhaps to give one's will to them. There are small escape hatches, possibilities offered: the lotteries, the Slaughtering Docks, the Technician's License and the Cult Leaderships, but they are, as we know, largely illusory, rigged against achievement and functioning largely as safety valves. It would be far easier for you if you were to accept your condition, give up; easier for me too because predictably I have fallen in love with you and your ambition works against the small layers of peace we might create as insulation. Come on, Quartermain," she said, offering me her hand, "come to me and rest. It really isn't that bad once you accept the circumstances. The machines don't want our souls, merely our respect."

I looked upon her, my gentle and wise Counselor, assigned to me many years ago to give comfort to me as I was to give comfort to her, each of us Counselor to the other in a relationship alternately stratified and affectional. It would be easy, I thought, easy to take that acceptance which she offered, to give into the will of the machinery and the dark administrators who controlled the complex. For a passing moment I felt that I could fall against her and plunge into a darkness and fulfillment more profound than any I had ever known, but in the next instant I had passed through as I had done so many times, and knew that it was impossible. "It is impossible," I said. "I want to be a Cult Leader. I want to have my servitors and the congregation; I have something to say, I want to disseminate that message. I do not want to give in, not when the will exists to be otherwise."

"Vanity of vanities," she said quietly, "all is vanity."

"So true," I said. "To give up is vanity, to struggle is vanity. To struggle is what I have elected."

"You are a fool," she said, "a self-dramatizing fool." Her eyes were moist. "Come here," she said, "look upon the city; all of the greys and greens. The walls of the city were erected to guard us against the monstrous, the truly insane, outside of those walls anything may happen—"

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"Vanity of vanities," I said. And thought of the desert outside those walls, the desert upon which, if I were strong enough, I would take the forty and assert the oath and return to toss one by one with casual strength all of the money changers from the temple. "The time, the season."

Her hands upon me insistent, her voice against me insistent. "You are a fool, Quartermain," she said, "and the price of your foolishness will be mightily extracted from you.

"Cult Leaders have their choice of women," I point out.

FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN: The fortieth day expires and, grumbling, Satan releases me; he has, after all, no choice according to the contract. I return to the city where food and water await me along with devotion of my followers, a small and hardy band who seem to have increased in my absence. They look at me with awe. "It wasn't that difficult," I say self-deprecatingly, "I was armored with the strength of my own innocence. Too, you have to consider the benefits." Nonetheless they remain unshaken in their devotion. I have returned gaunt and bearded and it is possible that an aura of the divine clings to me although the secret is that it is not faith but cynicism which has gotten me through the ordeal. "Rabbi," one of them says, "what do we do now?"

"We gather, we formalize, we recruit, we go upon the countryside, perform miracles, raise a dead man or two, redeem a harlot, comfort the sick, give grace to the graceless, find an ass, come into Jerusalem, attract the attention of the legions and so on and so forth," I say. "Eventually, sooner than we would like, we get to the grimmer parts but that does not have to concern us now. In fact," I say rising, "this does not have to concern us at all. Consider it merely as a journey, as a set of tasks to be completed for a pre-ordained goal." For me, if not for you, I think.

"Did you *wrestle* out there, Rabbi?" a boy asks, his eyes round and devoted.

"Like a son of a bitch," I assure him.

UPON THIS ROCK: Peter, Paul, Mark, Simon Peter. Judas is the only problem; eventually I find a thin, sullen youth with a limp whose generalized rage seems easy enough, when the time comes, to direct toward betrayal. Assuming custody of the lot and giving them simple instruction I go upon the countryside. Loaves and fishes are easy, the Magdalene interlude only slightly embarrassing. (She misunderstands my motives initially. It has been so long since Counseling that I almost respond but fortunately hold myself in check and eventually the Magdalene understands.) Lazarus is noisome and disgusting, far fleshier and more odorous than might possibly be inferred through the materials but discipline and a visualization of the many rewards of being a Cult Leader squeeze me through the vile episode. Peter follows me into the fields on the evening of this adventure and says, "Are you sure you want to go through with this, Quartermain?"

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"Of course I'm sure," I say. I should point out—if it is necessary to point it out—that the disciples, congregation, observers and hangers-on are all professionals from the twenty-second who function in Simulation; they have their own reasons for being on the scene. "That was all settled in the desert."

"You seemed overcome with revulsion back there. And the really difficult stuff is still ahead."

"Nothing to it," I say. I give the trembling youth a clap on the shoulder. "After what I've been through already this is *nothing*."

"Very well," Peter says, "I'm just trying to help. We *are* disciples you know; we have that responsibility."

"Oh I know that," I say with a booming laugh. I am really quite giddy; who would not be, considering the situation? "I know you're there to help. And the best way that you can help is by *staying in place*."

"Certainly," Peter says, "certainly, Rabbi," but I detect a bit of sullenness in his posture and am given to understand, as I should have understood from the beginning, that my goals and those of the disciples are not necessarily confluent. They are, after all, creatures of the Simulator and hence of the State. One must embrace this understanding and after a time one does.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD: The ass, a miserable creature, is taken from pasture and I am lashed on. Somewhat awkwardly I ride into Jerusalem surrounded by my ragged troops. (The texts give no hint of the essential indignity and anonymity of the enterprise; there are *many* riding on asses toward Jerusalem in this time. Only in retrospect did I assume stature.) I find rude quarters; Judas disappears upon predictable, mysterious business. The Magdalene comes to visit me during this interval in my tent, and when she drops her cowl I see to my surprise that she is my Counselor.

"Well, what did you expect?" she says. "There's a long commitment here. I had to come and be with you to see it through. Now come home before it's too late."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's time to stop. This is ridiculous, Quartermain. You've done very well up to this point but now the nails and the torment begin. You haven't really begun to suffer."

"Are you working for the Simulators?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she says, tossing her head in a gesture not unlike that of Satan a long time ago although I do not, for an instant, confuse the two. "I'm working for no one. I care for you. I have your interests at heart. Listen, you've shown a lot of courage and you've carried this on far longer than almost anyone. We can have a nice life together. It isn't so hard once you give up and accept the situation. And you've proven a good deal to yourself."

"Leave now," I say. "Leave before I become angry."

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"Come on," she says, putting her hands on my shoulders. "Enter me. Let me show you what you'll be missing. Cult leaders must remain chaste you know."

"*I* must remain chaste," I say. Her breasts suddenly appear. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to help you come to your senses before it's too late, Quartermain. This is insane." She rubs a breast against my nose. "Come on," she says, "it gets much easier once you accept the truth."

I hold her arms tightly, desperately wrench her away from me. She stumbles back. "Get out of here," I shout, "get out of here right now!"

Her eyes are luminescent. "You're really serious about this," she says. "You really *are*. You *believe* in this—"

"Don't you?" I say. "Don't we all?"

"You fool," she says, backing toward the tent flap, "don't you know that no one has *ever* become a Cult Leader this way? They told me the truth and I'm risking everything by carrying it to you but there's no other way. All of the Cult Leaders are State Employees, the stories of the Simulators are all lies, just to keep the masses in check, to make them believe there's a way out. Now get out of this before it's too late."

"And you too," I say, "you too. And after the life from which I saved you and the immortality you have been given. It is too unkind."

"You're mad, Quartermain," the Magdalene says. "You're filled with madness."

"Get thee behind me," I say and plunge toward her furiously, but the canvas drops and I am alone.

BEFORE THE COCK CROWS: The crowd—much larger than before and more respectably garbed—shouts for Barabbas and Pilate says to me in his heavy accent, "You see, it is quite impossible. I gave you a fair chance, however. You must admit that."

I say nothing to him. There is nothing, after all, to say. I can hear Judas frantically counting his silver somewhere in the background. The crowd murmurs for the next step in the process and I move forward, lift my arms. "To the high place," I say, "to the high place now."

A blush spreads over Pilate's features. He leans toward me and whispers, "I've been authorized to make you a final offer. We can get you out of here quickly. There's no need for this, Quartermain. We're all on your side and really you've done admirably until now, there's no reason to suffer—"

"To the high place!" I scream and the soldiers seize me under the arms and take me away. There is an instant of hesitation as I brush through the crowd and for a harsh, shocking instant I fear that the soldiers too are authorized to make me a compromise but then common sense reasserts itself along with speed and I am carried away. Huge wooden blocks are fastened in place along my back. The soldiers cannot possibly be part of an authorization. Not *everyone* can be in on this. They could not employ

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and manipulate thousands simply to divert one Quest. Or could they? The resources of the technicians are awesome. I may have misunderstood the situation.

WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? The thieves, chatty in their dilemma, toss insults back and forth over me as I hang in difficult posture. Flashes of color below give me hope that the casting of lots has begun. "Ain't it a bitch?" one of the thieves says, "ain't it just a merry bitch? The things a man gets put through," and then he dies or at least he seems to die, his face slackens, drool appears, his body gives out and lies slack. "I had big plans," the other thief confides to me, "I didn't see no way to make it in the armies. But I guess there's just no way for the common folk, eh chief?"

"Before this night is out you shall dwell with me in heaven," I say.

"Ah," the thief says, "the same old bullshit, that's all you get."

FORGIVE THEM! In the blood haze one of the hundred priests in the guise of a bird appears before me. "Quartermain," he says, "I am prepared to make you a final offer. This is the last time. There is no Resurrection. There is no Church. There is nothing; you have been misled by the texts just like so many of them, so it would serve you to attend closely. We can get you out of here and make you a Lecturer in Metaphysics. With a high-level rating and much better domicile. Think of the comforts. Also the Counselor. She's very emotionally tied to you."

"Go away," I say.

"Quartermain, you're not being reasonable."

"Go away." The huge dark bird flutters, inclines. "I mean it," I say. "I'm not going to sell out now. I've gone too far."

"You're crazy. There's nothing beyond. Nothing."

"There's a Leadership."

"You'll be dead."

"In the Simulators?"

"Truth," the bird says. "This is no dream, you fool."

"Go away," I say for the third time. The bird shakes its huge head.

"You're a fool. Quartermain, you could have had it all."

"I have nothing if I yield. Upon this rock I will build my church."

"You were warned," the hundredth priest says and flies. Coma storms and lashed to the wood, I lose count of the breaths of my betrayal.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS O YE GATES: The stone is rolled away on the third day but I am not there, of course. Nor on the fourth, fifth, or tenth. On the fortieth they think to search the desert and there they find my bones, thus obviating any necessity for worship.

In the twenty-second you can't take anything seriously. O

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by
Richard Purtill

GORGONISSA

Richard Purtill, a Professor of Philosophy at Western Washington University, has written fifteen books. His latest include *The Parallel Man* (DAW Books, July 1984) and *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion* (Harper and Row, October 1984).

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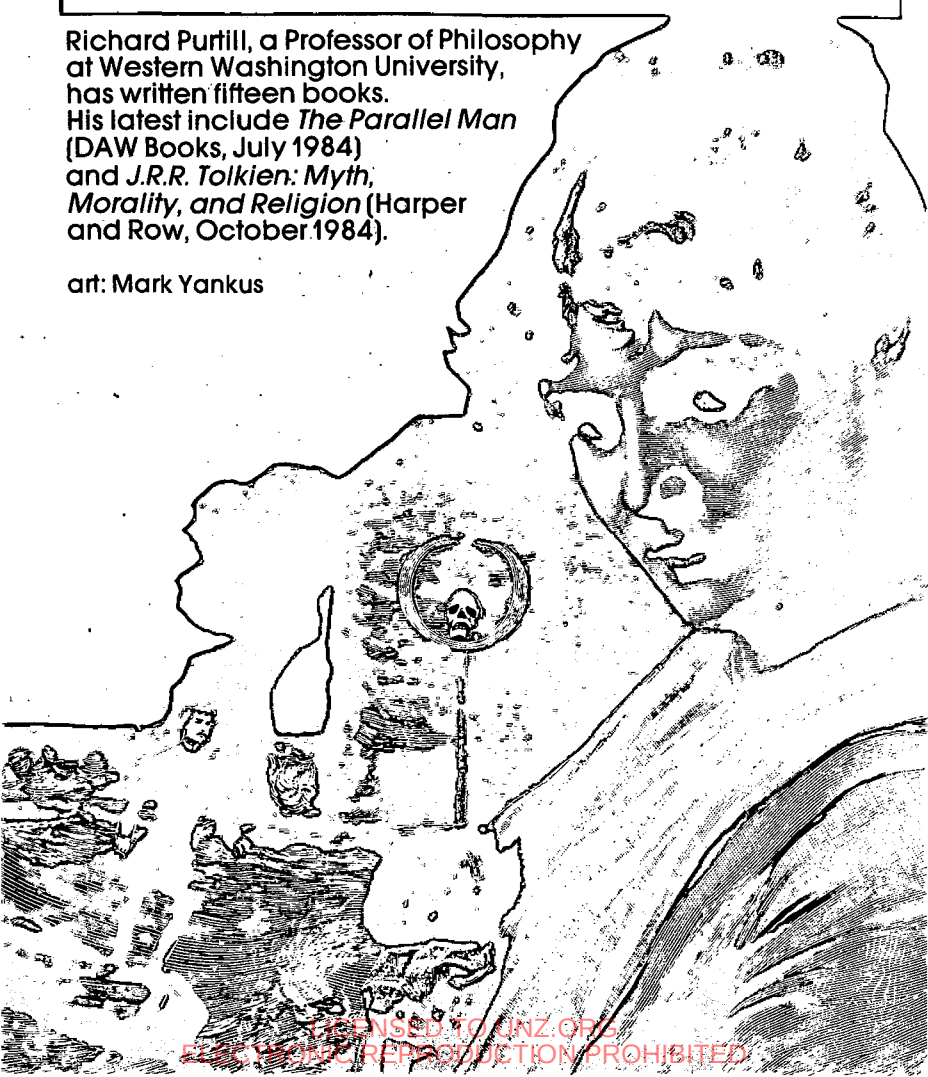

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Gorgonissa is a small island, so small that the ferry does not dock there, but stands by offshore while small boats take passengers and cargo from the ferry to the harbor. There were not many of us going ashore, but I waited for the second trip rather than be squashed in the first boat with the returning islanders, their bundles and their small animals. There were three lambs and two young goats in the first boat, bawling piteously and getting underfoot. There was one man in the boat who looked English or American, along with a white-bearded priest who except for his black robe might have posed for a picture of Santa Claus.

The second boat held mainly cargo along with myself and two elderly English ladies of the kind you find traveling in pairs in the most unlikely corners of the world. I wondered idly what they wanted on the little speck of an island in the Aegean, what they would find to do for the week until the next boat. What would I do, for that matter, if my half-brother was no longer on the island or if I finished my business with him quickly? But both were unlikely; according to the purser, he had come on this boat, the only one to serve the island, and had not left on it. As for finishing my business quickly, nothing involving Jerry had ever been quick or easy, and I didn't suppose that was likely to change now.

When we got to shore the boatman demanded an amount that seemed unreasonably large to me. I understand Modern Greek fairly well, but I refuse to wrap my tongue around its barbarous distortions of the pronunciation and accent of classical Greek. At any rate it is sometimes convenient to pretend not to understand. I held out about half the amount he had requested and he took it with a shrug. One of the elderly Englishwomen gave him about the same amount.

I opened my mouth to protest but thought better of it. I would have been quite willing to pay the whole price of the boat if it had been a fair price, though I would have expected thanks and at least an offer to pay their share. As it was, I had paid as much for my seat as they had for their two, and this irked me unreasonably. I nodded distantly to the two women and set off for the hotel with my bag.

There was only one tiny hotel in the town, fourth class but reasonably clean. The two Englishwomen did not appear; they were probably renting rooms in the village. That pleased me, for I was still a little annoyed with them, but it pleased me less that Jerry was not registered at the hotel. It would make it that much harder to find him.

The bored young girl at the desk told me in her school-learned English that there was hot water, so I took a shower immediately; hot water in even the best Greek hotels tends to come and go erratically. It was siesta time, what the Greeks call "mesimeri" and I knew everything would be closed, so I lay down on my hard narrow bed for a nap; I might be up late looking for Jerry in whatever bars the little port town had.

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When I awoke it was still light but the air was cool. The sun had set behind the high hills at the center of the island so that the whole town was in the cooling shadow of the hills, but the sky was still blue. In fact, with the breeze from the sea it was almost too cool. I put on a jacket and set out in search of dinner and information. One of the little tavernas on the edge of the harbor had a large sign saying that English was spoken; I might get both food and news of Jerry here, with luck.

I ordered a beer, a salad, and the shish-kebabs the Greeks call souvlaki and let myself be drawn into conversation with the gray-haired man named Nick who owned the place. He had worked for most of his life in Chicago to earn the money to buy this little restaurant-bar in his native village, and he spoke English with a Midwest twang. In fact, his Greek seemed a little rusty when he gave an occasional order to a waiter or bus boy.

"I prob'ly shouldn't have come back," he confided in me as he sat at my table drinking a beer that would probably go on my bill though I hadn't offered it to him. "You forget what a dead-alive hole your home-town was; you only remember the good parts. I thought at least I'd get all the tourists who speak English here, but people who get this far off the beaten track usually talk some Greek and half the time they go to the little local places and I never see them."

This was too good an opportunity to miss and he might as well earn that beer. "I stopped here because the purser on the ship told me that a relative of mine is on the island," I told him. "I wonder if you've run into him. His name is Jerry Doolan; a big red-haired man."

Nick grinned. "Oh yeah, got the map of Ireland on his face, like they say. He was in here a couple times for a beer but he's a case of what I was talking about; he talked Greek pretty good and he liked to spend his time in those little dives down the end of the harbor drinking ouzo. You don't look much like him, for a relative."

I hope not; I like to think my features are aristocratic and Jerry's are pure peasant. "He's the son of my step-mother," I said shortly. "I usually call him my half-brother to save explanations. I'd like to get hold of him; do you know where I could find him?"

Nick questioned his waiters in Greek, but their replies seemed to me sullen and evasive. Nick turned back to me with a frown. "They don't know and don't want to know," he said in a puzzled voice. "He must've got the people here mad at him. Prob'ly over a girl, that's usually what causes trouble in these little places. That's about all I can think of 'cause when he first came here he was pretty popular—always having a drink and a laugh with the fishermen."

There was nothing much more to be got out of Nick; I finished my dinner and moved on before I found myself buying him more beer and

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listening to more of his reminiscences of what seemed to me to have been a very dull life in Chicago. I wasn't sure which "end of the harbor" the "little dives" were located, but the harbor had only two ends; the town made a little crescent around the small bay which was the town's reason for existing.

I went to the wrong end first, of course; there was nothing at that end but small houses, children running and playing, and women gossiping on the doorsteps. It was getting dark when I got to the right end of town and I followed the sound of recorded bouzouki music into a little bar filled with men who could have been fishermen. There was no red head in the crowd and few that weren't white or grizzled; I supposed the younger men left the island in search of opportunity.

Still, I had to start somewhere. I sat at a little table and ordered a whiskey, settling for a brandy when they didn't have whiskey. The whiskey they usually had would have been terrible, but the order established me as a rich foreigner and I could let Greek curiosity go to work.

They let me finish my first brandy in dignified silence, but my second brandy came unordered. Then came the questions asked by a rabbity little bespectacled man whose English was very good. He relayed my answers in Greek to the other men who had pushed up their chairs to make a sort of circle around me. One Greek tradition that has survived from the time of Homer is giving hospitality and expecting a good story in return; Odysseus got the same treatment at the court of the Phaecian king. The questions nowadays are rather more personal than the ones Homer records: Are you married? Do you have children? What is your job? How much do you earn?

This inquisition usually annoys me, but this time it served my purpose: eventually I was asked why I came to Gorgonissa, and I replied that I was searching for my "brother," Jerome Doolan. I had decided to say "brother" rather than "half-brother"; family is important to Greeks and if I called Jerry my brother it would give my inquiries into his whereabouts more authority.

As soon as I spoke Jerry's name, even before the rabbity man translated my question, I felt the mood change in the room. Everyone had been staring at me as if they had never seen a foreigner before; now they looked away and began to murmur among themselves. There were no more questions and I had to ask my interlocutor directly if he knew where Jerry was. He shook his head. "He is no longer on the island, sir," he said. "He has gone away with a . . . local person."

Wondering if Jerry's proclivities had at last got the better of his rigid Catholic upbringing, I asked whether his companion had been a young man. That might account for the odd reception I had been getting to my questions about Jerry: rural Greeks have none of the Classical Greek

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tolerance for homosexuality. But the rabbity man's surprise seemed genuine. "Oh no, not a man," he said. "Your brother went with the lady."

That was an odd way to put it: Greek uses "the" far more than English, but this man's English had been fluent and correct up to now, a little pedantic, if anything. And it did not sound like a slip back into Greek idiom; there was a special tone in his voice as he said "the lady." You could write down what he had said as "He went with The Lady" to convey the impression his words gave. Who was this "local person" who was referred to with such respect?

"Perhaps he'll return soon," I said. "Where did he stay in the town?" The man hesitated, then said, "He had a room with Kyra Sylvia, down the street. But I believe that he will not—that he was not planning to return."

I nodded with pretended indifference and asked *him* a few questions, about the island and how the islanders made their livings. He answered courteously, but soon made an excuse to leave my table. I finished my brandy, nodded to the bartender and went out without offering to pay; my money would be refused but I was in no mood to give thanks for their hospitality.

I thought I might have to wait until the morning to check out the place. Jerry had stayed, but there was a light in the window of what had to be the house, and I knocked on the door. A black-clad crone answered the door and looked at me inquiringly. "Are you the Kyra Sylvia who rents rooms?" I asked.

"Room, yes, good room for the tourist; you look." She thrust a big old-fashioned key at me and pointed to some outside stairs near the door. I hesitated, but the way she bellowed the words, she was probably deaf; I might learn more from looking at the room than from questioning her.

I went up the stairs and opened the massive wooden door, and switched on the one light which hung from the ceiling, wondering idly where the electric power came from on Gorgonissa. The room was bare but clean with a narrow bed that was even harder than the one at the hotel. I stood on the bed to get at the high cupboard above it. Even in some fairly good Greek hotels if you go off for a few days, they are likely to tidy your luggage into a closet and rent your room while you're gone; the more honest places don't charge you for the room if they rent it, but some places just pocket the extra room rental and say nothing to you.

For once I was glad of this practice; it meant that if Jerry had gone off intending to come back his luggage might have been stuck away to await his return. I was right; when I wrestled the warped cupboard door open, his bag, his shaving kit, and a jacket I recognized were right at the front of the cupboard. But there was a surprising amount of other luggage here, too; some of it old and dusty, but some of it surprisingly

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new and expensive. I opened one case which wasn't Jerry's; it was some sort of salesman's sample case by the look of it. Then I searched Jerry's things thoroughly; what I was looking for was not there and there was no indication of what he was up to, except an old book on the Greek Islands, with a place marked by a used ferry ticket. I opened the book and the reason for Jerry's visit to the island was immediately apparent. The crude line drawing in the book might have been a copy of the golden plaque we had found on our dig on the Turkish coast. But the legend below it said "Rock carving in a cave in the White Cliff, near Chora on Gorgonissa Island."

Just then the door opened and the black-clad woman came in, her dark wrinkled face more curious than alarmed at seeing me apparently looting the luggage of the absent guest. I decided to take the offensive. "Jerry Doolan is my brother," I said, pointing to the luggage. "Where is he? What have you done with him?" She opened her mouth to speak, then caught sight of the book in my hand, opened to the drawing. She began to laugh, a wheezy cackle.

"Ask her," she said in Greek. "Ask that one." Then she began to laugh again so hard she started to cough. I could get nothing else out of her and finally flung out of the room in a temper leaving the bed strewn with Jerry's luggage and the old woman cackling and coughing. Serve her right if she choked, I thought viciously. I was half way back to the hotel before I realized that I had left the book in the room. Might there be more information in it? But I didn't want to argue with the old woman that night, so I continued on to the hotel and fell into bed. In the morning, the hotel seemed deserted. I walked over to Nick's place and got some breakfast. The waiters seemed to look at me strangely, but Nick was as friendly and garrulous as ever. I asked him about a guide book or map of the island, but all he had was a crude map intended as a handout for tourists, with advertising for several businesses on the other side. It was enough, though: "White Cliff" was marked on it, a little down the coast from a landing marked "Mules' Path to Xora." It must be the place, and I might find either Jerry or some trace of him there. "I'd like to rent a small boat," I told Nick. "Preferably without a boatman."

He shook his head. "Guys around here won't rent their boats," he said. "Can't blame 'em, the boats are their living. I got an old tub I inherited from an uncle that died. But I already rented it to some English people. Hey. Maybe they'll take you along. They're just rowing up the coast to climb up to Chora. Prob'ly haven't left yet."

"That would suit me fine," I said. "Thank you, I'll go see if I can find them." Following Nick's directions, I got to the dock just in time to catch the English party pushing off in a shabby old-fashioned rowboat. The

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two English ladies from the boat nodded at me rather coldly. But the man at the oars gave me a friendly grin.

"By all means," he said. "I could use a spot of help with the rowing. I suspect this tub weighs a ton. I'm Tony Carradyne: you probably know Miss Briggs and Miss Thwaite from the ferry trip over; you all traveled first class. I find it much livelier in third class, with the Greeks. D'you know some old ladies were doing a village dance on the lower deck to music from a transistor radio? And some of the kids were playing at being Odysseus and others were playing video games in the lounge. That's what I love about Greece: ever old and ever new." He chuckled, his eyes alight with enthusiasm.

"Are you the Anthony Carradyne who writes the travel books?" I asked. "Used to be an academic, didn't you? I'm James Deveraux of the Archeological Institute; we met once long ago, I believe."

He nodded. " 'Fraid I don't remember, but we might very well have. Yes, I retired here after my wife died and eke out my pension with travel books and mystery stories. Gives me an excuse to wander about Greece. Are you on that Institute dig on the Turkish coast?"

"Yes, I'm taking a bit of a break while they get down to the interesting levels," I said. "I wanted a little break from Turkey, but I'm afraid I don't share your enthusiasm for modern Greeks. They're a bit of a mongrel race, really; they've intermarried with their conquerors and neighbors."

"That's just as true of the Classical period Greeks," said Carradyne argumentatively. "And the language has survived though it's changed and grown. Language and culture are what make a people, not just genes. Heaven knows that we English are a mongrel race, but . . ."

I shrugged. "It's just the culture that *hasn't* survived," I said. "Modern Greeks are a superstitious, church-ridden lot. Not much Classical rationality around in Greece today." I was content to argue with him while he pulled the heavy oars, taking me where I wanted to go.

Carradyne laughed. "Like a good many classicists you concentrate on the Apollo side of classical Greece and forget Dionysus," he said. "Plenty of what we'd call superstititon in ancient Greece. Pan in the woods, nymphs in the fountains, mermaids in the sea . . ."

We bickered amicably as Carradyne rowed down the coast, and I never did take my turn at the oars which suited me well enough. He had been a professor of philosophy or literature or some such subject, not a scientist, but he knew a great deal of classical archaeology for a layman; you had to be careful of generalizations or loose statements arguing with him.

When we reached the landing place I had seen on the map, Carradyne and the women hiked up the trail to look at icons in a church in the village. I have little interest in Byzantine church art and invented an interest in possible ruins on the shoreline to excuse not going with them.

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I had spotted a much lighter and more modern boat pulled up on the shore, a sort of reinforced rubber dinghy and as soon as they were out of sight, I borrowed this and set off in the direction of the White Cliff.

The trouble was that there was not one but many white cliffs, all of them riddled with shallow caves. It took me hours to investigate them all and I began to envy Carradyne and the women who had planned to have lunch in the village after seeing the icons. Finally, however, I did see some stones that might have been the remains of a small temple; some still on shore and some visible below the boat in the clear water. There was one nicely carved column base, with traces of the lead-covered centering plug still in it, so that I wished I could get on shore for a closer look.

Next to the ruins was a deeper cave, and I paddled cautiously into it, watching out for sharp rocks that might hole my boat and leave me stranded. Then I looked up and there, carved on the wall near the entrance to the cave was the same figure I had seen on the golden plaque we had found in Turkey, the plaque Jerry had stolen. In the damp cavern the fish scales on the lower part of the figure seemed to have a silvery gleam. On this larger scale figure you could see that it definitely was a sort of veil which covered the face, in curious contrast to the bare breasts below.

"Do you like her?" came a voice from behind me. I whirled around, almost capsizing the boat, and for a moment I thought there was a statue in a niche on the opposite wall. Then I realized that it was a young woman in an elegantly simple, light-green dress, which suited the darker green of her eyes and the dull gold of her hair. She was on some sort of walkway on that side of the cave, which I had missed because it blended so well into the rock.

"I find it extremely interesting," I said when I could find my voice. "I'm an archeologist and I've never heard of anything like this in this part of the Aegean. Why isn't it famous?"

She shrugged her shoulders with delicate grace. "She has been in the past, perhaps she will be again," she said. "But the island people tend to be secretive about her; perhaps they don't want her to be a tourist attraction."

"Tourists be damned. It ought to be studied properly for the sake of science," I said. "Does it have a name, a local name, that is?"

She smiled enigmatically. "The local people call her many things," she said. "One name for her is 'Potnia tis Thallasas.' " She added something in a curious sing-song intonation; it sounded like Homeric Greek but the accent was so strange I could only catch a few words. Not a modern Greek accent certainly, and not the way a classicist would pronounce the words I could catch, but it sounded somehow right.

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"I couldn't get all of that," I said, " 'Potinia tis Thallasas' would be 'Lady of the Sea,' would it not? But 'Potnia' is a Mycenean word. Surely people here don't speak Mycenean Greek; that's even older than Homeric Greek."

She shrugged. "On the islands old words are remembered," she said, "even the Kaphtui name, 'P'dare Mia,' they use sometimes. You may call me 'Mia' if you like, it's one of my names."

The first part of this seemed nonsense to me, and the name 'Mia' had associations of film-making and Beautiful People. She must be some rich girl vacationing on the island, perhaps even from a yacht moored somewhere nearby. If Jerry wanted to sell the plaque, she or the people with her might be the kind of people who would buy. She might even be the mysterious "lady" Jerry was said to have gone off with. I had to learn more about her. "Are you staying somewhere nearby, Mia?" I asked, putting as much charm in my voice as I could. I'm not unsuccessful with women, though I don't like them much.

The charm seemed to work; she smiled and said, "Come and see." Unfortunately just at that moment I heard the sound of oars outside the cave and voices calling my name. The woman's eyes narrowed in calculation for a moment, then she said softly, "I will see you in the port tonight, at the ouzeria they call 'Gorgona.' Keep the boat you are in until then; we may need it. Now I must go." She walked further into the cave on the walkway, vanishing into the shadows.

I wished I could investigate where she had gone but it was urgent to prevent whoever was looking for me from finding the carving on the wall. I rowed swiftly out into the sunlight and around the next headland I saw Carradyne standing up in the boat we had come in and scanning the shoreline.

"Where on earth did you get the rubber dinghy?" he asked, but swept on without waiting for an answer. "The two ladies caught a minivan which passes for a local bus, back to the port town. I thinked we bored them with our argument on the way here. I was having a leisurely ouzo with the priest from the church with the icons when I happened to mention that I'd left you exploring the shore. He got most agitated and insisted that I come down and 'rescue' you; I'm not sure from what. Even gave me a holy relic to preserve me, bless him." He pulled a small jeweled cross with a sort of box at the center from his shirt, petted it affectionately and put it away again.

"A rather wealthy-looking young woman gave me permission to use the dinghy; I think she may be off a yacht or be vacationing at a villa near here," I told him. "I'm supposed to return it to her in town tonight; do you think we can pull it behind the boat? I'll give you a hand rowing back." I was that eager to get him away from the cave.

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In the end, he did more than his share in rowing back, too; whatever his faults, Carradyne was not mean. He asked no questions when I asked to be dropped off in the rubber boat a little before we reached the town. I pulled the boat up in a little cove around a headland from the end of town where the bars were, and as I hiked back to the hotel I discreetly spotted the little ouzo bar called the Gorgona down a side street near the end of town. The faded sign over the door had a picture on it that might have been intended for the rock carving in the cave, but no one who had not seen the carving would have recognized it.

I was lucky enough to arrive at the hotel at hot water time; I showered and rested a while before going to Nick's for dinner. There I found Carradyne arguing with Nick about the Chicago Cubs and I couldn't avoid joining him for dinner. When he caught me looking at my watch, he chuckled. "Don't worry, Deveraux, I won't horn in on your rendezvous," he said. "I have one myself; I have to meet Father Photis at the church to return the cross and look at some old church records."

Relieved of that worry, I became more amiable, and we argued cheerfully enough through dinner and a drink afterwards. Carradyne had a good deal of out of the way information and a ready wit, and I found him amusing. However, it was not so amusing when he brought up the subject of Jerry when we were having our final drinks.

"I understand you've been looking for Jerry Doolan," he said casually. "I know Jerry a little from digs he'd done in Greece, and I share your concern. He's a good archaeologist and a good man. The locals say he's gone off with a woman."

My temper got the better of me. "That's a crock," I said bitterly. "Jerry's a faggot, and besides, he's a thief."

Carradyne's voice was quiet as he replied, "I'm probably more likely than you are to think that homosexuality is a sin. But it's not my business to condemn Jerry for it. Why do you think it's yours? And what did he steal?"

"He stole a gold plaque from our dig in Turkey," I said bitterly. "The Turkish authorities know it exists; if we don't get it back, it will reflect on the Institute."

"And on you, because you're his half-brother," said Carradyne softly. "You're thinking more of your reputation than of Jerry, I think, Deveraux. Perhaps about the other thing, too. Well, I ought not to judge you either. But I think I'd rather be Jerry than be you." With that he left some money on the table and walked out.

I shrugged. The man was a fool. Reputation is important in itself and important for other things, the big rewards. I wasn't going to let Jerry get in the way of *my* plans. If he had sold (or given—he was that foolish) the plaque to the girl I was to meet tonight, no doubt I could get it from

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her one way or another. Some ways might be more distasteful than others, but I'd do it. I'd settle the mess in Turkey, then come back and "rediscover" the veiled figure in the stone carving. It ought to be good for a monograph, even a bit of publicity in the popular press. Every little bit helps. As for Jerry . . . But first the girl.

It was lucky I had located the Gorgona by day or I would never have found it by night. There were as many women here as men, which is very unusual in Greece. The women weren't prostitutes either; they were mostly middle-aged or older women with an air of authority about them. Their men seemed rather subdued.

The music was live; wailing laments and occasional satirical songs from a middle-aged woman who reminded me a little of Mia. There was one guitarist; a thin young man whose burning eyes never left the singer. There was only ouzo or brandy to drink; I nursed one brandy for a while, then drained it and ordered another.

Toward midnight, everyone in the place stood up; I imitated them, thinking it was some local custom. I looked around and saw Mia standing by my table; she sat down when everyone else did. Whatever the odd little ceremony had been, it was over; there was a quiet hum of conversation around us.

Mia looked at me, her green eyes enigmatic. "You are looking for Jerry," she said.

I decided to try shock tactics. "And a gold plaque he stole," I said.

She shrugged. "Perhaps the plaque stole him," she said obscurely. "Perhaps it wanted to come home."

I felt a sudden thrill. "Did it come from here?" I asked. "Are there more here?"

She smiled. "Perhaps. Do you know what it is?"

"A decoration from a cult statue," I said confidently. "Like the ones you can see at Delphi, that were on the ivory statue of Apollo. They made a sort of stole, like a priest's stole. This one had holes at top and bottom, as those do. Perhaps the cult statue here was some sea-god. The Delphi plaques have gryphons and other fabulous monsters, this one has . . ."

"Not fabulous," she said, "and not a god. As for the other, perhaps."

I was tired of the riddling talk. "Do you know where it is?" I asked. "Where Jerry is? Will you show me?"

"Oh yes," she said with a smile, "come and see." That was what she had said before we were interrupted at the cave, but this time there was no interruption. She led the way out of the cafe. As we went out, everyone stood up again; the same strange ritual again.

She seemed to know where I had hidden the boat and led me straight to it; I supposed she had spotted it coming into town. The sea was calm, the boat light; we had an easy row to the cave. She pointed around the

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next headland and I went past the cave and into a little bay beyond it. I expected a yacht, or a villa on the shore; there was nothing. "Is this a trick?" I cried, my voice harsh. "There's nothing here. Where's Jerry?"

"Look below," she said, with a strange little laugh in her voice. I looked down into the clear, moonlit water. The hair of the floating figure did not look red in the moonlight and the face was puffy, but I knew it was Jerry. He seemed to be caught by his feet in the seaweed on the bottom so that he reached up from the floor of the sea like some obscene flower, swaying in the water. Beyond him was another body with darker hair, but the face—oh, God, the fish had been at the face . . .

Deep in the water was a shifting green-gold glow. "There is my bed," she whispered. "The gold is there. Come and see." I looked in the water beside the boat and she was there, her breasts bare, her powerful fishtail flicking occasionally to keep her in place. There was a veil on her face, but it seemed to be melting away . . .

Then I heard oars and the heavy rowboat came around the headland; it must have been hidden in the cave. Carradyne was rowing and a white-bearded priest in black robes stood easily in the prow like some strange figurehead. He had some sort of candle-lantern in his hand, richly decorated, like a sanctuary light. Gravely he addressed the creature in the water. "First the salesman from Athens, then the red-haired man, now this one. You grow greedy, girl! You know the promise you made; no more than one man for each moon of the year, or you lose your right to take any . . ."

The creature from the sea gave a bitter laugh. "When have I ever had even a half of that since you priests came to spread guilt and fear, to threaten the young men with hell-fire if they came to me? In the old days they were proud to be my consorts, to live with me till I tired of them."

The priest's voice was steady as he said, "And were their mothers and wives also proud to have you steal their men at your whim, and let them drown when they angered you? How many in all the centuries have pleased you for more than a little time? Do you think this one will?"

She laughed again. "This one is safe from me, priest. You don't need to threaten me with the bones of the terrible old man who bound us here. I brought this one here to frighten him; his body is young, but inside he is old and withered. A good thing for me; had he been more to my taste he might have tempted me. The second one left me hungry—oh so hungry; he was not for women. I do not know if I can bear it until another comes I can take."

Carradyne's voice came then, seemingly confident, but with a little tremor in it. "How about me then, mistress? I'm old outside but young inside. And by all that's holy, what a way to go!"

The creature in the sea looked at him, and there was a green fire in

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her eyes. Her tongue-tip touched her upper lip delicately. "Yes," she said softly, "you have much life in you."

The priest's voice broke in deep and soft. "Sin is sin, my son, even if you do it to save others. You may not do evil that good may come."

Carradyne laughed, and the tremor seemed to be gone from his voice. "What sin, Father, fornication? Why, marry us then and I'll go down to my marriage bed down below there. Then the young men won't have to leave Gorgonissa when they become men and come back only when their hair is gray."

"But she is not . . ." the priest began.

Carradyne cut in, "Who knows what she is, Father? But you said yourself that Saint Photis baptised all of them. He must have thought they had a soul to save. Get out the book you brought, Father, but turn to the wedding ceremony."

I have never seen a Greek Orthodox wedding before or since, so I have no idea what they left out, but it didn't take long. There was some sort of business with crowns, which appeared suddenly floating on the waves. They looked ancient and even in my dazed condition, I longed for a clearer look at them. The "servant of God Anthony" took the "servant of God Mia" to wife for better or worse, for richer, for poorer. At least I think these were the words; if not, something like them. Then the priest gave a blessing and Carradyne clasped my hand and then slipped out of the boat. The two of them sank beneath the waves and vanished, and I looked at the priest in horror.

"But it's suicide . . ." I said incoherently. "What does the other matter, all that . . . But he'll die under there . . . How can you . . ."

The old priest shook his head. "They do not all die, if the stories are true," he said quietly. "Not those who go down willingly to her. And even the others not at once. When they awake and know where they are, they panic and die, if she has left them, if she is displeased. Perhaps she will not leave this one. And if he does die, he did it for the people of this island. 'Greater love hath no man . . .' Perhaps he would be a martyr. Or perhaps you are right and it was suicide. I must pray about it. But now, we must go home." And he took the oars in his hands.

When we got to the dock, he laid his hand on my shoulder and smiled. "I have prayed and I think this was for the good, my son. Do not fear. After all, you were best man at the strangest wedding you will ever see. And sometimes the best man is asked to be godfather, later on."

It meant nothing to me; I went ashore and walked away from the sea until I could no longer see the water. I stayed inland until the ferry came and stayed in an inside cabin until we got to Piraeus. I flew from Athens to Istanbul, and went direct to the dig by car and tried to bury myself in work. When Jerry's body washed ashore in Turkey with the golden

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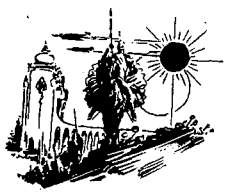
plaque in his pocket, the Turkish authorities made a fuss, but their threats meant nothing to me. Eventually they went away, grumbling.

That was last year. Today, two things came in the mail. One was the plaque, finally released by the Turkish authorities because their experts had decided that it must be a modern fake. Such a figure, they said, is never found on really ancient work: the "gorgona" or mermaid, is a modern Greek superstition. They were wrong, but the decision meant that I was free to do whatever I wanted to with the plaque. The other thing that came in that mail was a letter from Father Photis from Gorgonissa; the island of the Gorgona. I am invited to a christening there. I think I know of a present for the baby. I wonder if they will have a gift for me? ●



MARTIN GARDNER (from page 53)

COMMENT ON SATAN AND THE APPLE

The story (the plot of which, by the way, I snitched from a little known fantasy by Lord Dunsany) is not strictly contradictory, but it has a strong flavor of self-referential paradox. If the woman always tells the truth, then her last sentence must be true. But if it's true, her entire story, including the final sentence, must be false. On the other hand, if the last sentence is a lie, perhaps her story is true.

Many novels, short stories, and poems have played with similar themes of self-reference. You'll find some of the classics discussed in the chapter on logic paradoxes in my book *Order and Surprise*. My favorite example is a limerick, but to understand it you must first contemplate the following two-liner:

There was a young man from Peru
Whose limericks end on line two.
What do you make of this shorter limerick?
There was a young man from Verdun.
If you don't see the paradox, check page 152.

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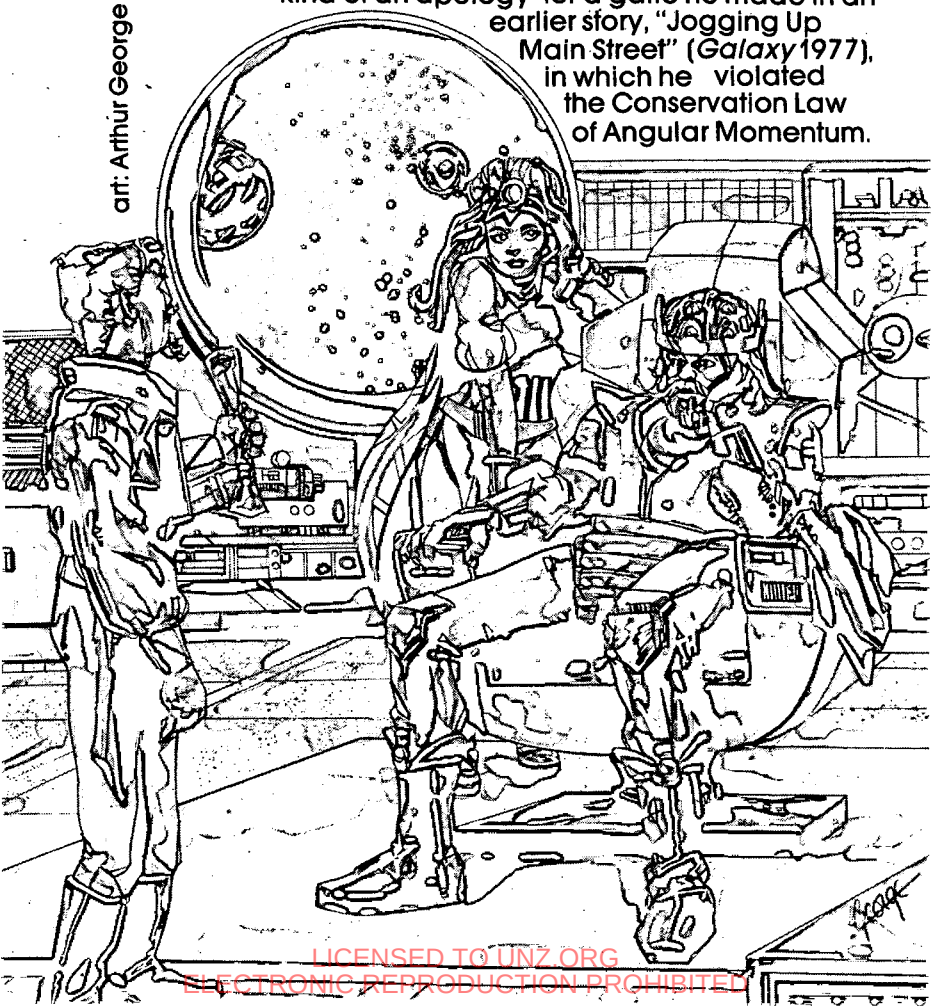
THE SPINNING KINGDOM

by Thomas Wylde

© 1984 by Thomas Wylde

This charming fairy tale is also a rather intriguing piece of science fiction. The author says that it is kind of an apology for a gaffe he made in an earlier story, "Jogging Up Main Street" (*Galaxy* 1977), in which he violated the Conservation Law of Angular Momentum.

art: Arthur George



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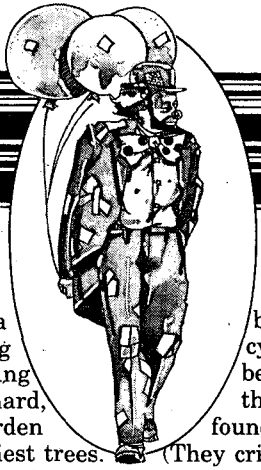

Once upon a time, in a beautiful forest kingdom nestled within a spinning cylinder that traveled between the stars, everything became alarmingly buoyant. The wind blew very hard, then died down. Children playing in the King's garden found they could hurl their toys higher than the tallest trees. (They cried, waiting for them to come down.) Swimmers in the central lake complained of water so frothy and high-splashing they could hardly get their breath. Field slaves were seen leaping far into the air, and laughing excessively in unproductive delirium.

All life in the kingdom was thus disrupted, and the King became very angry. "Call the Royal Engineer!"

"I am here, sire," said he, blinking nervously.

The King glared. "How came this calamity to me?"

"Sir, it was *not* the fault of the Royal Corps of Engineers."

"It never is," said the King.

The engineer replied: "We have traced the problem to a pixilated control panel. It seems that the spin rockets started up all by themselves and—"

"All by themselves!"

"Yes, sire, on my life."

"*That* part's right!"

The engineer cleared his throat painfully and continued, saying: "Sire, once the rockets fired, they exhausted their charge of fuel. Now our spin is substantially diminished, and we have no more fuel to start it up again."

"I know *that*," said the King. "What can we *do*?"

The unfortunate man stammered. "I am at a loss. . . ."

"Intolerable!" screamed the King.

The engineer was sent outside to inspect the spin rockets personally—without a spacesuit. They could hear him knocking politely on the hatch for a full minute.

The King stalked his throne room. "I *will* have this lightness stopped," said he, "and all things *will* resume their weighty place in the world."

So it came to pass that the King called out across the kingdom, and his stentorian voice was heard in every village and field and knocking

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shop, saying: "Any man who can put things right shall receive half my kingdom and my only daughter's hand in marriage."

All the young men perked up their ears and their interest was exceedingly keen, for not only was this the *only* kingdom—and hence half of it was a very grand prize, indeed—but also the King's daughter was said to be surpassing fine and beautiful, and well loved, though nearly no one confessed to having actually met her—and those that did were certainly liars of a stripe most vile.

Thus there was a lustful rush to solve the problem, and a line of young men wound away from the castle and into the fragrant forest. It was noon; the arc lights glared, and the air was hot and dusty—though not unpleasantly so. Vendors plied the line of heroes with iced tea and sacks of potato chips.

The King, meanwhile, was in the treasury, brooding.

"Look!" he told his daughter. "On this spring scale all my gold now weighs but a quarter of its former weight. If things get any worse I shall have to become a beggar in rags—and you shall have to scrub floors in public toilets—for we shall be poor beyond belief."

The King's daughter was named Brenda. "Attend to me, old fool," said she, "and observe that when you weigh your gold on the *balance* scale—with known and legal weights for the standard—your gold still counts as well."

"This is true, naturally," said the King, concealing his relief. "However, unless we regain our bodily weight, we will become weak and unsightly puny, and when our journey is over, we shall not be able to leave this tiny kingdom for the much larger one we will find at our destined planet."

The King's daughter nodded, saying: "So get thee hence, father, and hear what the young men have to say. Surely one amongst them will solve this horrific dilemma."

They adjourned to the throne room and asked for the first man to be brought in. The King's advisors were stationed nearby to screen the more obviously faulty plans, although their many years' training as flunkies had dulled their judgment.

"Good sire," said the first man, who was a blacksmith's helper (and therefore strong enough to claim first place in line). "What is needed,"

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he said huskily, "is a mammoth bellows to blow a mighty jet of air into space from the perimeter of your glorious kingdom, thus augmenting its spin." "This sounds very intelligent," said the King, who then remarked: "How lucky that the very first man in line knew the solution. It saves a great deal of time."

But the King's advisors put their heads together, then drew straws to see who would report to the King. The loser, a youth named Rojo, crept near and said: "My lord, this solution would indeed succeed, to *some* extent, but it would also empty your kingdom of air, and we would all certainly perish with blue faces."

The King, whose face was now quite red with rage, sent the blacksmith's helper away, saying: "Put his head in the forge—and blow it white hot."

"Next!" screamed the chamberlain.

The second man approached, sweating profusely. "My liege."

"Obscenity!" raged the King. "Why dare you approach your King in so scanty a costume?!"

The man bowed and sought to cover himself with his hands, for he was dressed in runner's shorts. "Sir, I am an athlete, and I am dressed for sport—because when you have heard my suggestion, I am sure you will want me to commence my solution immediately."

"What, then, is the naked plan?"

"Runners, sire, as many as can be got—slaves included—who can run about on the inside of the kingdom and—in the analogy of the caged rodent exercising on his wheel—accelerate the spin of the world, and hence its gravity."

"Capital!" shouted the King. "Begin at once!"

The King glanced at his advisors, who were deep in confused conference.

The plan was implemented with commendable speed. Within minutes the first runners were starting off, padding down the hastily drawn path. The King stood on a balcony of his castle and followed the runners up the side of the world and over the top of his kingdom, then back down to the starting point. Soon all the King's soldiers were running, and the field slaves too, as well as shopkeepers, tradesmen, tinkerers, and ne'er-

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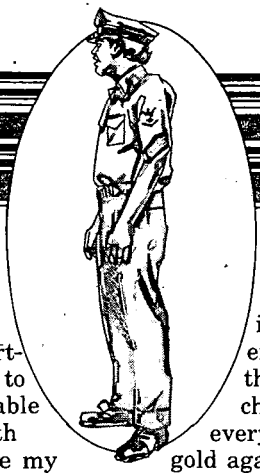

do-wells, all plodding industriously in the same direction. It was a heart-eningly *busy* scene. The King hurried hopefully to the gold room and weighed his treasury. No detectable change. He bristled, saying: "In two hours' time, with every man, woman, and child running, I will measure my gold again on the most sensitive spring scale in the kingdom. *Then* we shall see."

In two hours the athlete was brought before the King, who was kneeling beside his elaborate scale, frowning.

"Sire!" gasped the puffing athlete. "Every . . . man . . . and . . . *gah*! . . . woman . . . runs!"

The King squinted at his scales. "There is *some*thing here, the slightest extra weight. . . ."

Had he breath to spare, the athlete would have breathed relief.

"Good sir!" said Rojo, who had once again lost the drawing: "We concede now that some help *may* come from this coordinated running, but when everybody *stops* running . . ."

Immediately the King gave the order, and all the lobster-faced runners ceased running and began to throw up. The super-sensitive spring scale slid back down.

Since all his guards were lying in sweaty heaps all around the kingdom, the King could not give the order to have the athlete removed, so he picked up a bar of gold and crushed the fool's head.

"Next!"

"He sweated too much, anyway," said the King's daughter, rubbing her father's back.

The next in line was a freelance sailor on the central lake who suggested a giant sail be erected on the outside of the spaceship kingdom, to catch the stellar winds and blow the world to a faster spin, like a windmill.

The King's advisors quickly pointed out that the solution would take many thousands of years to produce a noticeable change, and the sailor turned white.

"Take him out and drown him," said the King.

The next suggestion came from a circus clown, who proposed that everybody in the kingdom walk about on stilts. The King realized how

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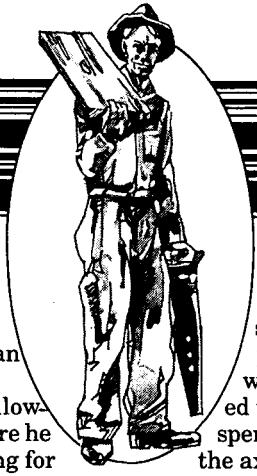

foolish he would look on stilts and reflected that he would suffer more than pain if he should fall off. He dismissed the clown without a word—and the unfortunate man was allowed to walk out of the castle and into the woods, where he spent many years looking over his shoulder, waiting for the axe to fall, and henceforth became a morose and bitter man who laughed no more.

"Next!"

Now came to the King a carpenter, who said: "Every house in the kingdom must have another story added on, and the populace must be made to spend much of its time upstairs."

The King turned his puzzled face to his advisors. "Does this make any sense?"

"Yes, sire," said the chief advisor. "If the mass of the kingdom can be shifted nearer the center, our spin *will* perforce increase."

The carpenter swaggered away grinning, a fat contract in his pocket. Construction began at once.

Meanwhile Rojo sat down with pencil and paper and scratched a long time, filling all the paper with numbers and drawings. In time he approached the King, who was in his daughter's bedroom, braiding her long blonde hair.

"Sir," said Rojo. "I have put what intellect I can bring to the carpenter's solution. And I detect a flaw."

"What?!"

"Oh, sir, it *is* true that some help will come from his plan, but not enough to make much difference. If he manages to move one percent of the kingdom's mass just ten meters off the ground, the total change to our gravity will be less than one tenth of one percent."

"Damnation!" thundered the King, yanking out handfuls of his daughter's golden hair. "That varlet was just drumming up business for his gangs of idle carpenters!"

Within minutes the carpenter was laid upon a table and his head taken off with a radial arm saw.

"Next!"

But the line had melted away in the heat of the King's rage. The throne room was deserted, echoing. "How can this be?" asked the King in des-

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peration. "Doesn't any- one in my kingdom desire to better himself? I'm offering half my kingdom —and my daughter's stinking hand!"

"Well, sir," said the young advisor. "*I* have a plan."

"Ah," said the King, licking his chops. "Go to it!" Rojo pursued his solution most energetically, first erecting pillars 250 meters in the sky—halfway to the centerline of the cylindrical kingdom—then connecting them with a fine mesh grid. The new deck was filled out and abundantly reinforced. Soon hundreds of elevators were put into frantic action, hauling up tons of dirt and trees and stones. Whole villages were uprooted and transported. The kingdom thrummed and twanged with industrious confusion.

The King was sore amazed. "You are stealing my kingdom!"

"Nay, sire," said the young advisor. "I'm merely moving your kingdom to higher ground. Next we begin construction on a new castle—just for you."

"I should hope so," replied the King. "And take care!"

Many months of wondrous machination crept by, and the King was moved lock, stock, and gold into his new castle-in-the-sky. Meanwhile, fevered work continued, hauling everything that could be hauled to the new level. The forests and meadows were replanted, and the lakes and streams were filled with fish of every description.

The mass of the kingdom was gradually redistributed, drawing in toward the center axis, like a spinning dancer who pulls in his arms and spins all the faster. And the faster the kingdom spun, the greater the gravity became.

The King, in his brand-new kingdom, was astonished by his new weight. "Look!" he shouted to Brenda. "These gold bars are now over half their original weight. A beneficial increase of more than one hundred percent!"

"It is a miracle," said the King's daughter, whose face nevertheless drooped unhappily. "Soon there will come the payment, for as we know—miracles ain't cheap."

Meanwhile the young advisor was busy with last minute details. The lower deck had been scraped bare to the metal skin. It was a place of darkness and gloom with outposts of violent light and harsh shadow.

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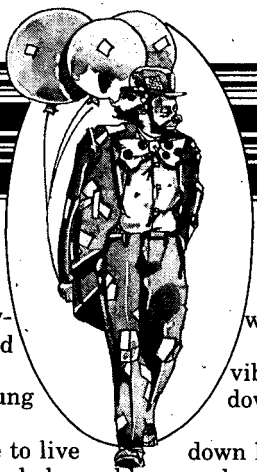

The pillars rose up everywhere, reaching high into the steely black sky, and the air was thick with metallic odors, uncanny vibrations, and the shrieks of machinery, which hung down under the deck like evil fruit.

The slaves were made to live down here, and the name they gave it was Hell. Their whole world was a dungeon of darkness. When the work bells rang out in the perpetual, echoing night, the slaves dressed in their rags and went up in rattling elevators to toil in the arc-lit fields of Heaven.

The King, in this Heaven, was mightily pleased with his compact new kingdom. Yet it galled him as the time approached to pay the young advisor his reward. "Must this be so?"

"I have an idea," said the oldest advisor (who was the most toadying of them all, having survived many, many purges by method of his unctuous sycophancy). The King drew nigh, leering in his horrible greed.

By and by the young advisor was sent for, and he appeared in his black work uniform and was dusty and reeked of his hard work and in short was so unworthy of seemly respect that the King was more convinced than ever that the upstart deserved nothing at all for his labors.

"Good King," said Rojo. "I have this day toiled to the bitter end and concluded my tasks. The kingdom is complete. I await only your pleasure."

"My pleasure?" screamed the King. "You stinking scamp! I have just returned from the treasury, where I found that my gold is only *half* as massy as before the accident. And you call your work finished?!"

"But sire," said the young advisor, bowing very low, "this is a full one hundred percent improvement. And believe me, there is naught more that can be done."

"Perhaps," said the King (stealthily grinning at Brenda). "Very well, let us proceed to the matter of the reward. Since you only delivered half a solution, I propose to deliver to you but *half* the reward. How say you on this?"

The young advisor bowed even lower, until his brow bobbed against the cold, cold stones of the throne room. "Sire, I accept—with profound gratitude."

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Now the King said: "As to which half of the reward shall be offered—it is my intention to *keep* my daughter's hand in marriage."

"As you will, sire," said Rojo (whose heart was secretly gladdened—for the King's daughter was a bitch exceedingly).

"Your reward, then," announced the King grandly, "shall be . . . half my kingdom!" There came polite applause from the King's advisors, henchmen, guards, hangers-on, etc.

"Thank you, my lord," said the young advisor.

"Now," said the King, "as to the actual distribution . . ."

Then the King explained: since his new kingdom contained but exactly half the acreage of his old kingdom, he decided it would be only fair if he kept all of it. "You have appropriated the other half of my kingdom in some manner I cannot fathom," said the King. "Therefore it is my decree that you leave my kingdom forthwith and return to *your* half of the kingdom—in whatever region you have secreted it—and remain there from this time on."

"Most kind King!" said Rojo. "I thank you."

"Now—get out of my sight, you filthy toad!"

The young advisor—now unemployed—adjourned from the upper world of light and descended into Hell, where he lived for many years among the grumbling slaves.

Rojo bided his time and made plans. He grew strong, living on the lower deck—for while the upper kingdom had been restored to but half its normal gravity, the lower deck (being twice as far from the spin axis) enjoyed full gravity of natural potency. Those who lived there became very strong indeed, while those who stayed in Heaven became puny and soft.

Ten years after he had sabotaged the spin rockets, the crafty young advisor led the King's slaves out of Hell and up into Heaven, where they made short work of its inhabitants.

Survivors of the battle were banished to Hell, the King and his incestuous daughter included, where they were crushed by the heavy gravity and made to crawl painfully about like loathsome slugs, and were never heard from again.

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Rojo became the new King and ruled in the name and memory of his father and brothers, who had all been put to death by the wicked old King over the years. Heaven became a very pleasant place in which to live, and the victors spent time on the lower deck so as not to lose their adaptation to full gravity. Many adventures were had, and many good times were enjoyed by all, and so forth.

The end. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 142)

SOLUTION TO SATAN AND THE APPLE

Recalling the two-line limerick, your mind completes the second one with:

Whose limericks end on line one.

Unfortunately, if you finish the verse this way, you give it *two* lines, thereby injecting a whopping contradiction.

Now for a final paradox. There is a certain event that I guarantee will or will not take place during the next ten minutes. You are absolutely incapable of predicting correctly whether it will or won't occur. I don't mean that it's *unlikely* you can predict it. I mean it is *logically impossible* to predict it!

You don't believe it? Then do the following. If you think the event will occur, write "Yes" inside the blank rectangle below. If you think it won't happen, write "No."

Now turn to page 179 to find out what the event is, and how good your prediction was. If you predicted correctly, I'll send you a million dollars.

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by James Sallis

NEED

The author's most recent publications include pieces in the *Western Humanities Review, Negative Capability,* and the *North Dakota Quarterly.* His book, *Jazz Guitars,* was published by William Morrow this past March, and he has just completed a novel, *Habits of Change.*

art: Arthur George

He wasn't sure exactly when he had first noticed the child, but several miles outside Milford, glancing up at the rearview mirror, he saw her there in the backseat and realized that she had been there, an unremarked presence, for some time. Yet he is certain they had no child along when they checked into the Fountain Bay last night. He tries to remember pulling out of the parking lot this morning, looking in the mirror as he would always do. He thinks maybe she was there then. But he's still not sure.

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The girl is reading a hardbound book with a green cover. There seem to be (in the mirror it's difficult to tell) dancing bears on the cover, a family of them perhaps.

"Good book?" he says after a while.

"It's okay, Dad."

"What's it about?"

"I told you yesterday. A daughter who vanishes without a trace."

"Do they find her?"

"I don't know. I haven't finished it yet, silly."

"I bet they do."

Beside him Rosemary's needles continue their minute orbits around one another. Whatever she is knitting now is green also.

"Always reading, that one," she says.

"You want to stop for breakfast yet?"

"Not unless you do."

"Well, let's go on another hour or so, then."

"Fine. We could stop at that truckstop just this side of Helena where we stopped last year."

"Sounds good. I'd forgotten about it."

Beneath bare trees the grass remains green. There are scattered small pools shallow as mirrors from last night's rain. From the radio come strains of a waltz.

Once, waking from nightmares of loneliness (he no longer knew how long it had been, or cared), he found Rosemary beside him, as though she had always been there.

They pass through a crossroads with a crumbling onetime gas station (tin softdrink signs still cling to its sides), Mac's Home Cooking 24 Hrs., a small wood church set up on pylons, a feed store. There is a mile or so of fence then, thick posts with single boards nailed obliquely between them, like mirror-image *N*'s.

The girl puts her book down for a while and sleeps, curled into one corner of the seat. Rosemary pulls out an entire row and starts it again. He can hear the needles faintly clacking together.

They stop at a Union 76 for breakfast not too long after. The girl (Rosemary has started calling her Cynthia) does not want anything.

"Never eats anything, that one," Rosemary says.

There is not much traffic, and early in the afternoon a fleet of bright-colored balloons pass over. Behind them clouds gather as though towed into place by the balloons. At one point they follow a truck piled with sugarcane for several miles. Then they drive through a pounding rain back into sunlight. When they stop again to eat (and again Cynthia wants nothing) it is almost dark; the moon is like a round hole punched through the darkness.

They leave and drive into that darkness. There is more traffic now, as they near the city. He spins the dial between classical, country, jazz and rock, unable to decide. Billboards at the side of the road advertise topless

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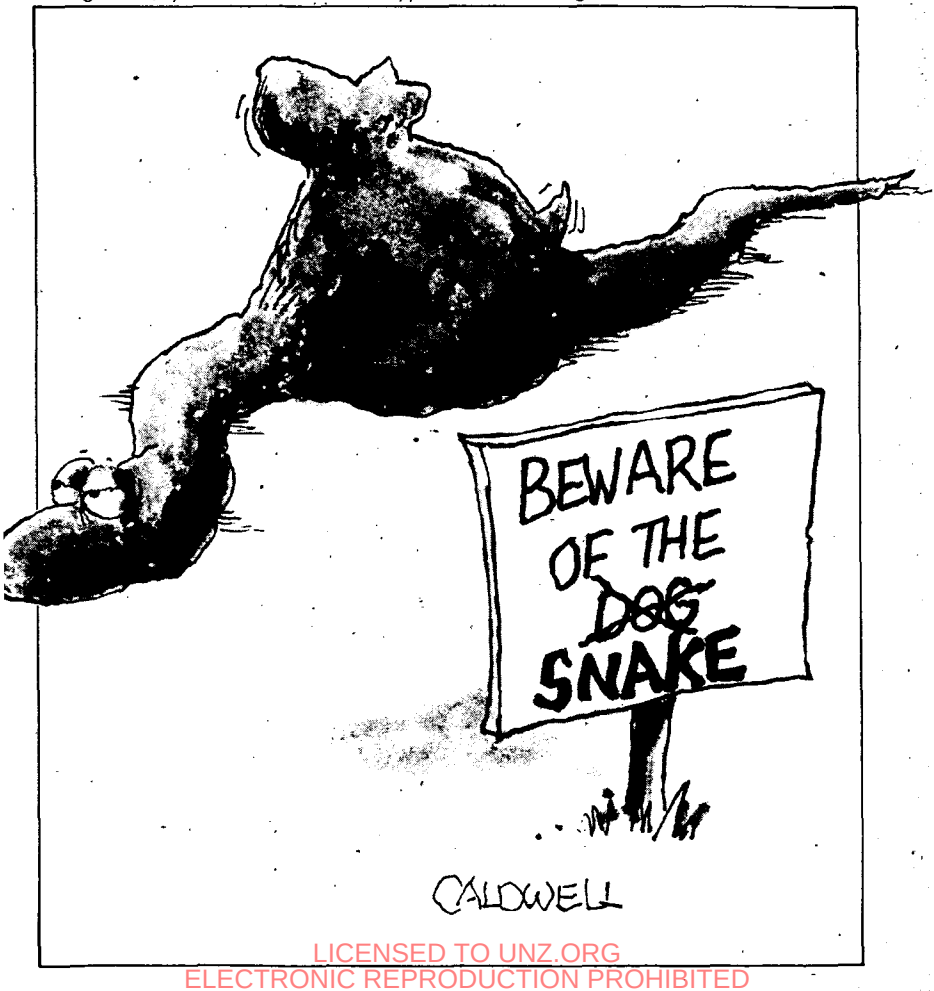
bars, car dealers, restaurants and motels, Jesus, museums, snake farms. Cynthia wakes and asks, "Are we almost there, Dad?"

"Almost, honey," he says.

Beside him Rosemary winds in her yarn, tucks the needles away. "Try this on, Cyn," she says. He watches in the rearview mirror as his daughter pulls on the green sweater that fits her perfectly. For the first time he realizes that it is cold.

The traffic gets heavier. It comes from far away, tiny points of light like ideas. Then they come closer, and as they come, cars and trucks take shape around them. ●

Running a Muck, *by John Caldwell. © 1978 used by permission of Writer's Digest Books.*



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art: Nicholas Jainschigg

by Gregory Frost

IN MEDIA VITA

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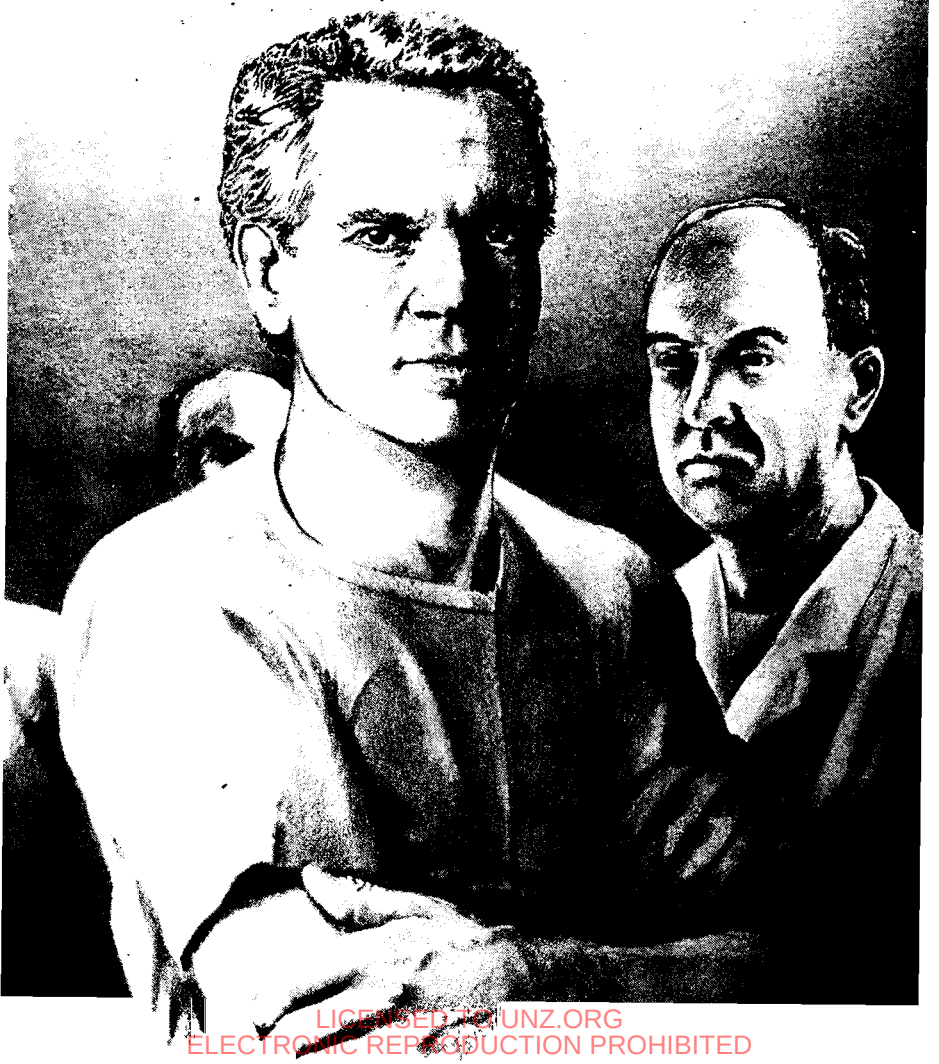
The author is a graduate of the 1975 Clarion SF Writers' Workshop. Ace/Berkley published his first novel, *Lyrec*, last January, and they have also purchased the first of a two-book opus entitled *Tain*.



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"Most of the time we think we're sick,
it's all in the mind."

Thomas Wolfe

September 9:

At least the airline personnel didn't treat us like pariahs. Every member of the crew, each scrubbed and clean face, portrayed friendly attentiveness. They operated under a misconception that we were rich nomads on our way to a health spa. Perhaps that's all Pregad Sanatorium meant to them. I wonder what they thought when, after all their efforts, nobody gave them a tip?

Tomorrow will mark the beginning of the fourth month I have labored at this diary. There is still no point in it I can see—I have learned nothing about myself or my condition. Ambler is wrong in thinking I might cure myself. Psychiatrists are idiots. Which explains why they can't figure out the lot of us. We look and act like other people. We have similar appetites, similar prejudices. Whatever it is that they claim is causing us to run down, it's invisible; but they've still packed us off like we're rotting lepers.

Around me in the jet not one passenger displayed anything other than the stiffness of insular politeness. Not one. You see, Ambler? I have no training such as yours, yet I can diagnose with the best of them. All frowns? The problem is certainly psychological: The Depression De-zeeze. Why don't you try singing, folks. "Forget your troubles, c'mon get . . ." Nope. Pack 'em off.

I would like to get out here.

The sanatorium looked like eggs from the air. Out from between the flat-faced Alps came Pregad. Eggs—four little three-minute eggs set in light-blue marbled egg cups, arranged in a quadrangle and connected by four cigarettes, all laid out upon a sugar-coated plate. I know: the architect was a chain-smoker with severe egg trauma. How's that for analysis?

When I reached the reception desk and the woman there asked for my identification, I demanded first to know the time of the next departing flight. Not one person so much as cracked a smile. We even hate each other, because we all remind us of ourselves.

Our escorts insisted we attend a lecture right off and ushered us into a hall that could have accommodated twice our number. Maybe it has. Rows of soft seats circled the center area where a single black podium stood. The ceiling—a pastel blue dome—had unique sound-reflecting capabilities: the voice of our lecturer, Doctor Gundar, squatted on my shoulders. Gundar could have been a creation of the same architect who designed this complex, his body a perfect ovoid, Humpty-Dumpty-Doctor.

The first thing he did was to knock over the podium.

I could not be absolutely certain—I sat in the back—but I think he

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trembled, as if we frightened him. He tilted up the podium and tried desperately not to appear ridiculous.

"You are all here," he began, "owing to an affliction given the name *abditosis*. You all know that you have it, but the case for most of you is that you know so little you have invented your own explanations. Whatever these may be, I want you to banish such fantasies. What you have, all of you, is a form of debilitation, of degeneration of tissues, leading to degeneration of organs and, finally, to entire internal systems, and apparently by random selection. The cause is unknown to me, as it is to you. Otherwise none of us would be here and the world would be free of disease once more."

I'm here because my maiden aunts—who raised me from the time I was five and who, therefore, ought to be held responsible for my infirmities of body and mind—signed the forms that the university sent them. My social withdrawal must have been suspect for some time, I'm sure. I know at least a half-dozen names in the history department who might have sent along those forms as a political maneuver to get Carl Borne out of the way. Someone must have gone into my office and found the medical reports, one or two of which stated straight out that I had a deteriorating respiratory system, cause unknown. I was sick—an enigma here where nothing's supposed to ail us, correct, Ambler? Medical science announces the greatest moment in history: the total eradication of disease. For two years nobody is sick anywhere. Then the rumors start—people are ill someplace. Always someplace else. But the stories trickle increasingly and soon it seems that some kind of malignant sediment is settling out of the river of humankind. Reports, studies, yellow journals crying "Sick!" the way they once called out "Commie!" with similar results.

All someone had to do was leak my medical profile to the rest of the faculty. Even being on the tenure track made no difference in the light of such a ghastly fact—there's always the Eternal Sabbatical. Diseases don't exist anymore but Borne is still sick. He's one of *them*. We can't have him here. What if it became public? What if it's contagious? How many parents would yank their kids out of the history department for fear they'd catch the Secret Disease? I could fill my nights trying to figure out who blew the whistle. It's easier to just say the department did it; and from there only a short jump to blaming society in general. Not Gundar, though. He wouldn't dream of blaming society. No, it's the enigmas seated before him who are the cowards in this drama.

"We *have* managed to determine phases of *abditosis*," he told us. "It is convenient to refer to them as stages, a total of three. All of you here are first or, possibly, early second stage patients. Most of you will have been sent before the second stage—the actual discernment of systemic deterioration without instruments—has taken place. The final stage, the third stage, will occur only if you fail to respond to our every curative attempt. There are some third-stage patients at Pregad from previous groups. If you should accidentally chance upon them, please leave them alone. Their state may appear cruel to you. Let me assure you it is not.

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Monitors coupled to their nervous systems have wiped out any awareness of pain while their deterioration continues much further than it would have done otherwise. From this, hopefully, we can discover the cause and the solution; but an encounter with them would not benefit your treatment.

"I should mention also that no two treatments will necessarily be identical. There exist different schools of thought regarding the cause of your disease here at Pregad. Some of us search for a purely physical catalyst. Others study types of personality."

Personalities were what the university psychiatrist who treated me believed to be the sole cause of *abditosis*: Dr. Ambler, you old sweetheart. You fight society out there, Ambler. You remind them of us and *they* don't want us around. You should give up your post at the university and join up here. You and Gundar probably agree on everything, right down to the number of bowel movements a healthy person should have per day. Even I unwittingly succumbed to your notions, didn't I? Look at me now, writing out all that's happened like a frenzied journalist hot to get it down while it's fresh, and for God knows whose posterity, and all because you thought it would be therapeutic if I did. I can't stop myself. It's become second nature, like farting. Something happens, I have to run and write it down. If I don't, I get twitchy, irritable. Is that what you wanted to develop? Were you hoping for a great novel out of me before I died? *War and Pieces*, eh, Ambler? You bastard.

Gundar promised to ward off death. He was lying, of course, but what else can the man do? *He* never dies while everyone around him does, imparting to him some sense of immortality which, paradoxically, he must know to be insane. Have I analyzed you accurately, Gundar? Why could he not have stood there and said, "Carl, all of you, I must tell you that I cannot face what is happening to you." Why couldn't *you* have said that, Ambler? I might have trusted you then.

"Look around you," Gundar said. "Get to know the people beside you. They will be your family, your social environment, from now on. Regrettably, as is true on the outside, you haven't had any say in picking your relatives." He made a small laugh; no one backed him up. "It was done for you, in this case by random chance. The difference between society outside and society here is that none of these people will abandon you, or turn their backs on your needs." Surprise! He does recognize society's inability to comfort its wretched refuse. "Look around you. Introduce yourselves."

Some of us, prompted by his comments, looked around, exchanging wary and uneven smiles. The first step. But contrary to his assurances, there were faces here that would have let me drown in a bathtub while they drew the bath.

September 11:

Yesterday I couldn't write. My emotions were too churned up. Today is hardly an improvement, but I feel compelled to say something.

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Three people share my quarters: two women and a man. The plan is obvious and unamusing.

Thank God I have my own room. We all do. One bed, two chairs, two tables and a dresser. They have even supplied me with a built-in tape system; volume and tone controls are touch-sensitive points marked by decals in the mahogany top of the dresser. All the tapes are pre-programmed, but a wide selection is offered. The dresser also contains my uniforms. They took away my clothes and luggage, assuring me that all would be stored safely until I left. Only my watch and this notebook exist to remind me I used to be someone else.

I share the single large outer room with the three others. All yesterday we sat around and tried to find compatible levels like people trapped in Singles' Bar Hell.

The shared room contains parqueted floors, onyx resin tables and lamps, and spongy chairs like in the lecture hall. A half-useful kitchen, too.

The women gave their names, last names only, as Foster and Aldine. Neither struck me as particularly interesting. In fact they seemed downright wary of me. This may be due in part to their having seen me exercising in my room that first night. Such activity reveals, I expect, a lack of willingness to resign.

The man, Schmudde, was a constant chatterer all day. Nerves, I think. He was German, he explained, and spoke English with a perverse Southern drawl because his teacher had been an American woman from Alabama who had moved to Bonn with her husband.

At one point he and I sat together in the shared room. Schmudde told me that his company—a manufacturer of "plastich"—made, among other things, a gelatin purportedly used by Pregad on some of its third-stage patients. He had even supervised production of it, was very proud of this. "Of space technology a child," he explained, "a treatment for liquid-fuel burns. I devoted my life to it."

He was about to ask me what I did when the two women emerged from their rooms together, as if on cue. Maybe it was, too. Both of them strolled demurely into the room, eyeing one another askance, hands clasped in front of them coquettishly. A strong wave of tension came off them like a perfume. They were adapting, playing parts normally outside their range.

Aldine, the red-head, sat beside Schmudde. She hugged him, but this hardly surprised me. Those two had already taken Gundar's words to heart and established a relationship. I'm not certain when, but probably that first night. Perhaps even on the jet. I remember wondering if all the other foursomes had linked up this way. How uncommonly convenient it was that we could all be divided evenly into fours. And to have a match for everyone, they must have done profiles. For instance, what about any homosexuals among us? Prior knowledge of preferences had to have been established. Random chance, my foot.

Foster sat across from me, close, but not so close as to force the issue.

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Her gaze tried to linger hopefully on me. How could she expect acceptance? Didn't these people recognize what a lie this all was?

I stood, excused myself politely, and went into my room.

I refuse to put myself into that place again. No. *No* dependencies.

God, I hope I die soon.

September 15:

My treatment I've always considered equivocal—as much so as the disease.

Ambler said he believed that the whole enigma tied to hypochondria. "Once," he said to me, "the 'big' disease was TB. That was the Victorian disease. Of course, that one was sought after. A person languished, skin became opalescent. In death, the victim became transcendent, more beautiful than at any time in life. Needless to say, we abolished that.

"Next came the cancers, all lumped under that classification. The generic cellular glutton, a handful of cells devouring and tainting all the rest, consuming everything that was healthy. Again, the ailment fit the time—redundant luxuries; fat diets; raging consumerism, the need to have more of anything no matter what it was; greedy power politics that had no concern for the cost of human life. Industrial plague and human gluttony.

"Now we have," claimed Ambler, "an invisible, untraceable villain in our clean and circumspect world. The mechanism reveals nothing of itself, almost as if the body is committing suicide because the entity inhabiting it is judged unfit. What's different here is that this one looks like a dozen other physically generated maladies that have all been wiped out. So what we don't know is whether this mystery has been with us all along and gone unnoticed via its mimicry, or if it *is* the body attacking itself. Suppose some people actually *need* to be ill, Carl. All we have to work from is an alleged common denominator: personality type. It's been smeared through all the journals and broadcasts in typical fashion. Headlines and quotes out of context so that there's no one left who doesn't think that you've done this to yourself. You scare the hell out of them."

I could have written a textbook on the personality type Ambler spoke of: the withdrawn person whose whole life has been a string of collapsing relationships. A person whose desire to try again had literally withered away after so many failures. How many times can Sisyphus roll the rock up the hill? Sooner or later he gives up. He must. He has to. I should have your answer, Ambler, but I don't. If you ever get this diary back—if they ever send you the copy you so richly deserve—may you find your solution here. All *I* have is questions. Setting them down has brought me no nearer to the answer. Nor has it changed what I am. I won't give up my individuality.

The room where treatments take place is wide and square, with lavender tiles and globe lights on arms, growing like luminous fruit out of the walls. Air tinctured by sterility. The doctor who conducted today's

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treatment was named Bree. Doctor Bree—a dark woman with all the dour charm of an executioner. She opposes Gundar. To Bree, all physical manifestations have a physical generation—even if it's radiation from outer space.

She started off by reviewing what Ambler had done with me. The initial "attack," as she referred to it, had not in itself caused permanent damage, so that I ignored my state and did nothing with it until the second "attack," which put me on oxygen in an emergency ward where the staff quickly ascertained that I had had no accident, had broken nothing, injured nothing, and so might be an *abditosis* anomaly. Might be, indeed.

She read this information off to me as if I were someone else whose advice she sought regarding this stubborn, problem patient. Furthermore, she added, the patient had spurned all attempts to assist him at every turn, had fought the invasion of his life rather than the affliction that caused it. She found Ambler's laxity in not calling for immediate drug therapy inexcusable and actually made a note on my file to have Ambler brought to task for it. What did you think you were doing out there, after all? People died, their bodies withered while you tried to find some intangible—and Bree claimed, non-existent—element in their minds. For a minute, while she said that, I actually considered re-evaluating my opinion of her. Abruptly, she shifted her tack.

"Any trouble breathing now?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"Get up on the table."

I climbed up and she pressed me down and made me roll over. "Now, don't move," she said. "You'll feel heat, maybe a burning sensation. Ignore it. Stay still." She directed me further up the table. A gray, padded brace rose hydraulically out of it and clamped around my throat—my first indication that I did not want whatever she had in mind. Too late. Her direct, business-like tone had tricked me into obeying. The thought of drug therapy made my palms break out in a sweat. What kind of drugs could be used in a case like this? They would restructure my personality; they would have to if Ambler was right! Bree came around in front of me, her uniformed abdomen pressing against my face, filling my nostrils with the scent of lemon soap.

Although I noticed no change, I think time passed. I recall a sudden awareness that my skull had begun to hum. Then I wasn't there anymore.

I recalled a girl from my younger days, a blonde and blue-eyed girl. Short and kind. I treated her lousy and she thrived on it, so much so that she eventually married a picnic ham who went ten rounds in a square ring for a living. Sometimes she was in the ring with him. She thrived on it. Does that make her better adapted socially, Ambler? *Yes*, you answer. Why?

I started reliving scenes with her. Then all of that shattered and I was watching Ambler hypnotize me. I was within myself, looking out, but someone else was going to sleep. I heard my thick, slowed voice answering

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questions for him about who I was and why I preferred my lifestyle. "No use," I replied, "all no use to me. What rates with everyone . . . empty, stupid." *Wasn't I happy?* "Yes—no. Unfair. An amoeba's happy, isn't it? But it doesn't know a lizard's happiness. Why should my . . . my hermetic form of happiness be less viable than everyone else's?" I chuckled. What a bizarre sound under hypnosis. "The joys of solitude. I laugh with Bacchus nightly."

The memory, which I had never experienced before, was crisp and clear—had happened just that way.

I became a child, who fell down a flight of stairs and broke nothing. Lying at the bottom, sobbing not from pain but because no one came to comfort me—my aunts thought I deserved it: "Next time you'll watch where you're going, won't you?" Quite abruptly, the stairs vanished and I was lying on that gray table, my head embraced by sweat-slick vinyl.

The back of my neck itched like a sunburn, so I reached up to scratch it. Doctor Bree slapped my hand away.

"Leave it alone, Mr. Borne. Let it heal."

"Let what heal?" My voice broke.

"The gate of course."

"Gate."

She responded bluntly. "I implanted a monosynaptic microchip gate in you. It's subcutaneous. The insertion technique caused you to have a few vivid dreams, no doubt. It's a very common experience, but you needn't worry, they won't return. Even the drugs I'll select for your therapy won't cause such side-effects. The itching's only temporary as well."

Released from the brace, I sat up quickly. My fingers dug into the material of the table's underside. There must have been madness on my face; Bree took one look at me and backed up, then said rapidly, "Didn't you read your pamphlet? The paingate was explained, its insertion described as absolutely necessary, the reasons stated clearly. Even a warning about the insertion side-effects." She regained some of her command. "If you had bothered to read it, you'd have known. . . . You didn't look at it at all, did you?"

"No."

For a moment she stood in silence, looking me over while she made her mind up about me. Then she said, "Come with me," and led me out of the room. We went along a circular hallway. Neither of us spoke. When Bree finally stopped, I thought we must have gone halfway round a huge circle. She opened a door and waited for me to step in.

The room inside rivaled the lecture hall for size. But it contained no rows of seats; rather, huge arrays of graphs and screens and computer terminals, CPUs and technicians. No one bothered to look at us. No one was curious.

"You are now one of these," Bree explained and gestured at the machinery. "Everybody here—every patient—wears a paingate chip. We can monitor your physical deterioration, figure the rate and try to un-

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derstand what alters that rate—chemical, hormonal, even electro-magnetic. And if someone suffers a shutdown of a bodily system, we can clamp down on any pain it might cause while dispatching a team to you in moments. The chip also monitors your feedback. What do you think of that?"

I didn't tell her what I thought. Truth was, what she said reminded me of Gundar's comments about the third stagers, about how they're electronically controlled so as to deteriorate further than would otherwise be possible. What difference was there between them and us now? What I said to her was, "What's my *feedback?*"

"Really, you're smarter than that. Emotional states, patterns. Doctor Gundar's part in the experiment. Learn the patterns and you can learn about how an individual reacts to given stressful situations." Her voice sneered at him.

"Why stress?"

"You ask the wrong doctor, Mr. Borne." She was joking, so she thought. "All right, like in ulcers, great unreleased tensions can cause a chemical imbalance, namely the release of digestive acids."

I leaned back against the wall. "Don't you think that throwing together people who have strongly developed isolationist tendencies is going to produce that kind of unwarranted stress?"

Her disdainful smile broadened—I had apparently reasoned something she had argued herself. "Did you suppose that 'throwing you together' was necessarily designed to limit stress?"

"In other words you want an explosion; you want death."

Before Bree could answer, one of the monitors behind her suddenly began beeping. Two of the technicians read out names and numbers into headset microphones. I gathered one of the patients had suffered one of Bree's "shutdowns." She hardly gave it any notice at all; not when there was a point to be made. "You over-dramatize, Borne. And it's time to go." She opened the door to let me out, but stopped me before I could leave. "If I told you Doctor Gundar believes that I am attempting to treat a functionally generated physical affliction by organic means, would you understand me?"

"No. I was a professor of history, not a neurologist."

"I have your background," said Bree.

"Then you must give me yours one day. I'd be fascinated to know what caused *you* to dry up." I turned away.

"Just a moment, Mr. Borne," she ordered. When I turned back, she was holding out a small red plastic card. "Here. This is your meal card. Diet is color-coded."

I accepted the card, stood there looking at it while she marched away. It was only after she had disappeared that I remembered I didn't know where I was. It took me half an hour to make my way back to my room.

Watch out for her, Ambler. Gundar may be a liar or a fool, but she's far worse—she's self-righteous.

Nobody else but Bree can be right.

* * *

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September 18:

Foster's name turned out to be Andrea.

Her initial approach to me had failed, but that deterred her only briefly. Yesterday, Schmudde and Aldine being out, Foster came into my room and asked if I would care to socialize for awhile—no strings attached, I could sit and affect interest if that was all I cared to do. Rather than fight the obviously inevitable, I relented and followed her into the shared room. She started to speak before we even sat down. "Did I tell you I was married?" then, "No, of course. We haven't really . . . have we? He divorced me last month, just after signing the order to have me sent here. You look at me as if I should hate him for that, but I don't. The signing had been a blade over my head for a long time. I knew I was the 'type.' He did, too, and others, friends. It would have been crueler for him to just leave and force the decision upon me. Don't you think?"

She spoke it so flatly, as if performing recitation, the words smothered in enough dullness to keep her totally detached. "He was a salesman. For entertainment companies—a rep. He covered all of Vermont and New Hampshire. But he never talked about his work. He thought it would bore me. I hardly ever saw him anyway." She laughed—there, she had made it all the way through the rehearsed material. She shifted for comfort on the couch and asked, "What do you do, Carl? I'm sorry—what did you do?"

Ambler: always thinking about history of diseases, as though sorting through past afflictions would turn up something. He became a medical historian, if only self-taught. Like any true historian, he could unroll all of time like a parchment and lay it out on a table, scrutinize the array of moments, draw a circle around one or stick in a pin and say, "There is when *this* all began." I know because I did it at the University for years, for thousands of students a cluster at a time, sketching flat history: pressed time on a blackboard.

I could not think of such images yesterday to tell Andrea Foster. I finally just told her that her whole exercise in being friendly was pointless and futile, and I left her. Yet, my metaphor for Ambler applies to me as well. He admitted being wrong finally; the study of prior disease cannot possibly aid anyone in this venture. Bree said much the same thing to me in her way. She disregards all possibility of "mind" or "will." These things are frivolous concepts so long as you can reduce our ills to cause and effect. For Bree, there are no functional diseases.

If she's right, then Ambler may have had the right idea; he just took down the wrong parchment. Had he unrolled the right one, he might have found my aunts out there on the edge of it. Two bloody old women with nothing to do but diagnose their single nephew as reclusive and degenerative, thereby diseased. No doubt they, those two great sexless examples of normalcy, helped vote in the laws that allow them and others like them to forcibly eject the likes of me from life. Wave goodbye, ladies, that's your nephew there near the tail of the jet. He hates your guts.

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September 24:

Doctor Bree started a new form of therapy today, though I don't know who is expected to gain from it. She acted as if the arrangement was against her better judgment.

I sat in the therapy room and other patients came in and told me their troubles; they were apparently having problems coping. They were unable to acclimate. There weren't very many of them, but I have never had to deal with simpering neurotics before and do not care to now. They hung on my every word like I was God, the Omega.

So far I have told six people to commit suicide. None of them have.

September 25:

Schmudde today. Foster has avoided me since the last encounter.

"You keep a diary," Schmudde said.

"So? So does your roommate."

"Ya, that is so. Still I think that you are an introspective man, Carl, and I should like to read what you have to say about . . . everything." He fidgeted while he spoke. We had spent virtually no time together at all—how did he know what kind of man I was? And when had he noticed me writing in my diary?

"In the lecture hall, on the first day," he replied when I asked this. I stared humorlessly at him, knowing he had to be lying. He squirmed, bowed his head. Finally, much more subdued, he said, "It was merely a request, nothing to anger you so. Please forget I have said anything." I made no answer and he finally got up and left the room.

It would appear I have succeeded in alienating everyone.

Instead of Bree being present for therapy today, Gundar was there. Immediately I came in, he said, "You probably don't realize it, Mr. Borne, but my idea of the arrangement here is that through socializing you might benefit yourselves. I believe your compelling desire for alienation is what generates your deterioration. Are you aware of that?"

"I must be—everyone tells me so. My aunties stressed for years that I should get out and marry someone, like that's some great cure-all. You know, raise a family."

"The idea is not without some merit."

"I should like to point out that neither one of the old lizards ever married or even tried to, and they've lived in squalid solitude since before my parents died and I got dumped on them. Do you think there's any chance I can return their concerned gesture and get *them* exiled here?"

"You see it as exile. Yes, I suppose it is. A witch hunt. Doubtful, however, that you can send them. There's nothing apparently wrong with them. And the degeneration itself isn't genetic, though the tendency may be. We're still looking at that."

"What is so damned unhealthy about being single?"

"Nothing at all." I was beginning to get the feeling that he found something about this discussion invigorating. "It isn't a question of quan-

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tity as it is quality, that is, the health of the situation. Why is a person single? Fear? Have they considered all alternatives and made the choice? Or is it just easier not to think, not to plan, to drift instead through an endless string of days?"

"I had two so-called 'attacks.' "

"You've been speaking with Bree."

"Yeah." I passed a hand over the lavender tile wall. It was slick. "Does socializing work?"

"Sometimes. The rest descend to third stage."

"Which is to say they die but they don't die." Before he could reply, I went on, "You know, I was just thinking that nobody can die from a disease if it doesn't exist."

He arched an eyebrow. "Would you explain that, Mr. Borne?"

"I'll try. It goes like this. Society hates the individual. It always claims otherwise, but that's an ancient deceit. Take historical myth—for instance, Tristan and Isolde: The single man, the individual, meets a woman who represents all the things that oppose the rules of society: real freedoms, of thought, of expression, of sex. He looks at society, looks at her, and says, 'See ya, society.' And he buys the farm. Every single son of a bitch in myth who tries to make a new world, to live a free life of his own choosing—who in essence tries to buck society—dies. The concept's as old as mankind. You don't have to have a disease; just an excuse. You're damn right it's a witch hunt!"

Gundar laughed. "Wonderful. And I agree with you in part. Genetic memory may well be reshaping mankind."

"Bullshit. Excuse me, Doctor. I know when I'm being had." I shut off the lights on the way out. "End of today's session, Gundar," I said, and left him in the dark. I would almost swear he was trying to provoke me.

September 26:

This morning we were all awakened by shouting from the corridor outside. Two guards stood there holding the man who was doing all the shouting. He wore a slick ski jacket, gloves, and thick-soled boots with the snow still dripping from them. He was not one of us. We had been invaded.

He screamed out a name over and over: "Helen!" while the guards wrestled with him, trying to contain him and shut him up. They could have hit him, but that seems to be against orders.

Gundar led out a flock of patients like a swollen Moses taking Israel out of Egypt, commanded the guards to release the man, then asked softly what it was all about.

"My name is Eric Laffin," said the invader. "My wife is here and I wish to see her." From his accent, it was obvious he was British. His large face was red as if he were angry, but mostly he appeared frightened, unsure of his position now that he had been discovered.

"Mr. Laffin," Gundar began as gently as if placating a child, "you sent her here. In doing that you knew very well you had forfeited the right

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to be with her, and might possibly never see her again. Most people start a new life, a whole life, as you must have known before—"

"No! No! You don't understand. She signed the forms without so much as telling me. She didn't wish me to see her die and signed my name —forged it. I knew nothing about it. I was in Italy on business and she was gone when I returned. I rang hospital and they told me where she was. Don't you see? I want to be with her! It's a mistake!" Nearly in tears.

Gundar blanched at the word "die" and glanced worriedly at those of us watching. Then he studied Laffin for awhile, but distantly, as though Eric Laffin reminded him of some old forgotten acquaintance. At last, he said, "Remove him."

"No!" Laffin shrieked. Immediately, he began his struggle anew. The guards started to drag him off, past faces that looked disgusted by his presence. How quickly we chose sides.

I stepped forward and grabbed the Doctor's shoulder. "Why don't you let him see her?" The guards stopped, the crowd turned to me, Laffin with wild hope. Gundar threw off my hand and nearly tried to strike me but contained himself. "You think he should see his wife, Mr. Borne? Great psychoanalyst, *Doctor* Borne?"

Ignoring that, I answered, "If there's a mistake, a breakage of rules, don't you think it should be cleared up? He obviously loves his wife very much in sickness as well as in health—remember how that goes, Gundar?"

His fierce expression was my answer, but to my surprise he consented. "Very well. Mrs. Laffin is on the third level. Would one of you please leave her husband and go wake her up?"

Laffin's eyes thanked me too much. I couldn't face him. The rest of the crowd stared daggers, but their resentment was easy to tolerate.

A few minutes later a blonde woman, thin, belting her robe as she moved along, came down the ramp. At the sight of her husband below, she stopped short, but her face remained blank, her eyes half-lidded. Laffin pulled free from his one guard and ran to her. He embraced her, burying his face in her hair, muttering her name. Then his body tensed and he took a step back. He stared into her eyes and tried to see past this monster that had invaded his wife's familiar body.

It was obscene that all of us stood there watching the scene played out, an audience of hundreds whose present illness had nothing to do with *abditosis*.

"Helen," Laffin pleaded, "why did you come here? Why? Don't you know I care? I want to be with you every moment, doesn't that mean anything to you?" When she made no reply, he pressed his face into her hair again. "My darling, my love, please. Don't do this."

She firmly pried out of his grasp. "Go away, Eric. I came here to be with others. I don't want to see you here. Go home, start over with someone whole, who's not—" she stopped, disturbed by her own admission. "I don't love you now. Go away." She ascended the ramp again

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quickly, met halfway up by a tall handsome man in a robe who put his arm around her and gave a final backward glance of contempt at the stricken husband.

Laffin stood like a scarecrow, wanting to collapse but forced to remain upright. Impaled. Gundar stared haughtily, triumphantly, at me. *He* knew this would happen. He had tried to avoid it, but I had interfered.

Laffin let himself be led away, probably did not know any longer what was happening to him. Gundar followed, slippers sliding through the puddles left by Laffin's boots. He slipped, arms flailing, managed to get his footing and hurried on like a novice skater desperate to make the rail.

When I turned around to go back into my room, Schmudde barred the door. Others stood loosely around us. Aldine absolutely hated me with her silence. "You should never have done that, Carl," Schmudde threatened in his Dixie Prussian. A few others muttered in agreement.

I remember my hands balling into fists, the stiffness of fear and readiness stealing over me. "Go piss up a rope. Now get out of my way—all of you." Schmudde glared as long as he could, but the fire fizzled and he lowered his gaze and shuffled aside.

I took two steps before I saw Andrea Foster. She stood inside the doorway. Tears were pouring down her face as she tried to will herself to look at me. Her lower lip trembled and she fled, defeated.

How much of the Laffins' exchange had she lived through with her own husband? How much had I forced her to endure?

She had reached her door, laid her hand on the knob, before I caught up with her. "Wait, please." She paused but could not turn around. Her body shuddered. "I . . . wanted to apologize for last week," I said, "Andrea."

She hurried into her room then. I went back inside mine, shutting the door on the lot of them still out there watching.

Later, in the midst of a trumpet fanfare by Corelli that called up to heaven, she came silently into the room and waited at the door until I saw her. Then I got up and went to her. Her eyes had dried.

Right now I wonder for how long had I wanted to touch her? I feel as if I'm beginning to understand something, as if I'm seeing it edge on. If I could just turn it. But I don't yet know how.

What's happening to me?

October 1:

I have been living with Andrea for five days. The first night we just sat together, listening to the music, saying practically nothing for hours. Later, when the words did come, they rushed forth in a torrent of apologies, forgivings, and friendship. We erased everything we had done wrong up to that point and began anew. The intent was to remain friends but keep our own rooms, allowing some distance to remain. That well-intentioned plan fell apart yesterday when we, when I

She invited me for a walk. In the center of the four eggs is a vast

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glasshouse garden with stone tile paths running through it as well as a stream that flows into a small waterfall. Few other people were out enjoying the moist greenhouse air and we walked in near solitude, silent and content in the knowledge that we could have spoken if we chose but were not required to perform any verbal ritual to satisfy one another. The place, I discovered, was large enough to become a maze. In my daydreaming stroll, I got confused as to where I was. Andrea had to lead me by the hand. We were like two children in a forest then, sneaking through the towering trees, laughing secretly.

We turned a corner and I, still drifting along, thudded into her. She had stopped, drawn up short. Sitting before us in a contoured, mobile blue chair, no more than a meter in front of us, was the first third-stage patient I had ever seen. His nurse had abandoned him for a moment, leaving him encapsulated in clear plastic and syrupy muzak.

Andrea put her fist to her mouth; I should have shielded her or turned her away, but I couldn't move or look away either.

Schmudde's revolutionary space-spinoff gel had replaced over half of the man's visible epidermis. His skin, clarified, revealed blood vessels and darker structures below—muscle tissue and such. His round eyes bored into my soul, flicked away, looked at her, then back at me again. They contained too much feeling for any one creature to endure—years of torment in a moment's glance. The man was aware!

They cannot answer you.

No, Gundar had been wrong. The answer rang as crisp and clear in my head as if the man had tolled a psychic bell. *End this!* he cried with his eyes. *Don't simply* look!

"What are you doing?" A male nurse charged toward us from another pathway, waving his hands. "Get away!" he ordered.

I tugged Andrea but she didn't respond. I turned her around. She stared through me, blinked, then focused. The male nurse loomed up behind her. I grabbed her hand and dragged her along the path. Suddenly, she burst into speed past me, pulling me after. She ran a frenzied course out of the garden, down halls where idle groups leaped apart to let us through, people looking mutely after us. Her hand nearly crushed mine.

We burst into the shared room past a startled Schmudde and Aldine, into Andrea's room, slamming the door behind us, both of one mind. She tore at the fasteners of her uniform, pulled it off, then worked at mine when I was too slow for her. Naked, we fell onto the bed and made furious, spasmodic love like nothing I've ever known. Her nails must have dug trenches in my back. Her head twisted from side to side, but when she stared up at me with eyes wild and glazed, I saw in them a lunatic reflected. The same ferocious need lay upon me, too. We gasped and struggled and came together, then lay with sweat like glue between us and listened to heartbeats and breaths. My chest ached. When she began to cry I cradled her beneath me and bowed my head to the pillow. "Alive," she sobbed. "Alive."

* * *

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I don't want to leave her alone now. When I got up to write all that down, I found the diary was missing from my room. It lay in the shared room, on the table. When we had burst in, Schmudde and Aldine were reading what I had written. They should have been history professors. I am amazed they didn't hide or destroy or simply return it, but they didn't. Maybe we scared them off: neither of them has put in an appearance here since. In that, they've made a wise decision.

October 8:

This morning Gundar came in and told me there is to be a Halloween party for our group, for those who are still here; this is a way of informing me that some people will soon be leaving but that I will not be among them. Guess what that means, Ambler.

The party is to be a theme event with costumes: the Roaring '20s.

October 12:

No more patients for therapy. Bree decided it was a bad idea after all, then made some vague references to trying "her" treatment next. I don't

We had a fight. I came back from the damned treatment and started the entry for today. Bree had me so worked up—I *hated* that stupid analysis game.

Andrea came in. She wanted to touch. Right then I couldn't. I was still too tense. She asked me what was wrong, so I told her. She laughed; that was how it started, even though her answer echoed my own reaction: why should it make any difference to me—I had complained about those stupid people anyhow. I should have agreed with that, but instead it generated some kind of friction between us. I argued irrationally that I had lost an opportunity to get some of those people to see my side—irrational because I had done nothing of the sort. And Andrea knew that. She asked me just what I thought my side was. I didn't have an answer—the whole argument was sheer rhetoric—so I did what people all over the world do when they get caught with their pants down. I got mad. I swore at her, told her to get out.

Now, sitting here, I don't even have the energy to put on a tape.

I know what it is, what's wrong.

I'm in love with her.

It terrifies me.

I used to believe I was an emotional cripple, but I hadn't even begun. In the first place, you must have emotions operating before they can be crushed. In the second place, you have to take a chance on something.

I have to talk to Andrea, show her this. I have to make her *understand*, can't let my stupidity sep

Decided to write. Dont know the day. Time.

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Bree says I had a respiratory seizure. Consistent with the pattern of someone sliding into a third-stage position, though she also admits the microchip she inserted hasn't revealed any deterioration at all. I felt nothing, just blacked out. She said the gate blocked my pain, kicking in as it should. My tissue deterioration, she says, is most likely so subtle that even their sophisticated scanning doesn't show it yet. She seemed friendly in telling me this, as if my falling apart has vindicated her in some way. Her amity makes me think she's lying about something. I'm to be kept here a few more days, maybe a week she says. Just in case there's a recurrence. A few more days. A few more days spent without Andrea. And how many are left me?

It is the fourteenth of October. Gundar told me. He also informed me that Andrea won't come to see me. Then he sat beside me and waited. I could feel him trying to make me say something, but I don't know what. All I could think was that he hadn't asked her—he had told her. But I didn't say that. Finally, he sighed heavily and said he had not decided if the two of us should see one another anymore. For the time being he believed it might be best to keep us apart. I have no choice but to stay here under observation. But he intends to have Andrea transferred to another group when space is available.

I could not think of how to reply. Would it have done any good to beg? I must have gotten lost in my misery—when I looked up again he had gone and the door was closing slowly, silently, a vertical strip of light thinning, gone.

If she refuses to come here the fault is mine alone. I drove her away. If only the seizure had been an hour later. Even a few minutes.

October 24:

Today I sneaked out for a walk and went back to our rooms. Gundar had spoken the truth. Andrea was gone. Schmudde answered my knock and the terror on his face made the pain of being locked away till now worthwhile. He backed up, nearly fell over the low table where he had been reading my diary when last I saw him. He babbled at me, realized he was speaking German, changed quickly to English.

"I meant no harm. No invasion."

"Sure. No hard feelings. Maybe when I'm better, I'll—" No, it was too much effort to generate anger. I stopped trying and actually felt glad. "Where's Andrea?"

He shook his head—he didn't know. I went past him and into the room that had been hers. Empty. All the bits of Andrea were gone. The same was true of my room. Obviously, I am not going to be returned here. The meaning of that only emphasizes what Bree told me.

October 29:

Gundar said no at first, but I insisted.

"You're throwing the party you took such pride in telling me about,

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and I want to go. There's nothing wrong with me, and even if there is, I don't give a good damn. You argued against solitude all along, now you act as if you want me locked away."

"Very well." He eyed me critically from beside the bed. "But no outbursts from you. No difficulties of any sort or—"

"Or what, Doctor? You'll remove the paingate? What can you possibly do to me to hurt me further?"

"Hurt you? I haven't hurt you. You hurt yourself. Then it is I who, like the cavalry in one of your Westerns, must appear in time. I know only what you need."

"You know nothing about what I need. Nothing about me at all."

He shoved his hands in his coat pockets and bowed his head to cover what I think was a smile. For the second time since my arrival, I had that overwhelming feeling that he enjoyed our verbal fencing. "So, what's your diagnosis," I asked, "of the patient's present state?"

"Distraught," he said softly. "Anguished, but trying desperately not to succumb." He raised his head. The sincerity of his expression surprised me. "I'm sorry it's so. My intentions were not to torment anyone here."

I saw again that tortured face that had stared helplessly at me in the garden. "Have you ever looked into the eyes of a third-stage patient, Doctor?"

A tic developed in his cheek. His mouth drew down. He walked away but, before going out the door, said over his shoulder, "Every day, Mr. Borne. Every single day. Even when I'm alone."

Just remembering the sound of his voice makes me look across the room at the door. I suffer now from an incipient quandary: who to pity more, the patient or the doctor.

October 30:

The Party.

The room is big as a gymnasium. Nearly five hundred people had been turned loose, dressed in old-fashioned tuxes and flapper costumes. Women glittered inside sequined gowns. Their heads sparkled with bands, caps or turbans of the same. Overhead, two mirrored globes spun like diamond stars, spilling sparkles through the darkened room and across the dancers.

A fast fox-trot was playing when I got there, trumpets blaring through fluttering mutes. The only guests missing were the third-stage patients, but who here could have pretended to have fun under the scrutiny of all those accusatory eyes?

I started wandering through the crowd, seeking the one face I needed. A hand reached up and clamped lightly on my shoulder. Bree. Her period costume revealed an attractive figure. But her face had not lost its hard, humorless edge, her mouth like a razor cut just bleeding.

"Come on. It's a party, Doctor," I reminded her.

"Stop it, Borne. Stop looking for her." So, everybody knew.

"Allow me a hobby, Doctor Bree. If I don't look for her, I might take

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my frustrations out on you. What else do you expect from the likes of me? Do you expect me to start over? Another time? You can't be serious."

"Why not? Most people here do. Without any trouble at all."

I grabbed a glass of champagne off a passing tray. "But you see, that *is* the trouble—with the whole fucking race, if you'll pardon the expression. Rotating lovers, it's like changing underwear." I sipped some champagne, then asked her, "By the way, have you heard the joke going around? How do you tell the difference between first and second stage patients?" She stared blankly, drained of thought. "Simple. You don't. There isn't any difference." Before she could think of something else to say I moved off and let the crowd fill in the gap between us. Knocking back the last of the champagne, I kept moving on, scanning, searching. The fingertips of my left hand tingled for a moment. I rubbed them together. The fear had begun to fill me up; she had not, could not, come. What if Gundar had been sparing me from some dreadful secret? Had she succumbed while I lay in a room alone? I had a momentary vision of Andrea, her skin translucent, clarifying as I saw it. The tension tied knots in my cummerbund.

The music changed. A fast, wild rag. Music was a signpost for human history, too. Frenzy usually entered music just before a disaster, an upheaval. When things died down again we returned to more somber tunes: Gregorian chants. Civilization, our grandest production number. God was Busby Berkeley.

A dancer swung around in front of me, strings of pearls cracking at her throat.

It was Andrea.

She saw me and let go of her partner. He followed her gaze right to me. Tall, handsome—I knew his face from somewhere, but could not place him then, watching her only. A look of panic took control of her features for an instant, but she fought it down and started to go back to the rag. I stepped through a brief opening in the crowd and caught her wrist. "Excuse me," I said to her partner. "This number was supposed to be mine. You must have the wrong dance-card."

His eyes flashed with anger and from that I recognized him—it was almost the same look he had cast down upon poor Eric Laffin before leading Mrs. Laffin away. So I asked him, "What happened to you—you wear Helen Laffin out?" The mention of her name sucked the color from his face. His sneer went soft. I took advantage of the moment to take Andrea away from him.

Placing my hand on her shoulder, I started dancing with her, much more slowly than the music required, steering us out of the crowd by degrees.

She tried hard not to be a part of my intentions, but she did not try to separate us. She accepted the situation by sealing herself off inside. If I let her do it very long, I would be talking with myself.

"What's the exchange rate," I asked, "for lovers these days?" She stared at me as if I had struck her; I refused to let go. "I thought you weren't

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like them. I can't believe you just switched me off and him on as simply as that."

"Don't, please. . . ."

"No. I haven't been able to spend five minutes without thinking of you since I first woke up in my sickroom. You wouldn't come visit and I accept that—you thought I had thrown you out, so that's okay. But I didn't. I never meant to. You were right—I didn't have anything to teach those people at all—and I was ten seconds away from coming into your room to apologize. Now I've lost weeks with you and that may be all we've got left. Okay, maybe we were drowning in each other, and maybe the distance has been good for that, but I've been without you long enough, I've had enough distance."

She studied me up and down, maybe expecting the answer to be written on me, the words I Love You pasted down the front of the tux. At the moment when I expected her answer, she tore free from me and ran into the crowd. I stood stupefied, then plunged in after her. Instead, I found her partner and Gundar. The partner took a threatening step forward as I came off the dance floor, but Gundar stopped him and gestured him away. The man retreated reluctantly into the crowd.

Gundar clucked his tongue. "What did I tell you? And here you are, about to cause a . . . a ruckus. He would have beaten you to the ground, you know."

"Maybe."

"Most definitely." He said it with a trace of humor.

"All right, he would have. Why?"

"You hurt him deeply with your remark about Helen Laffin. She committed suicide a week ago. He was asleep in the room with her when it happened. She had no more love for him than she did for her husband." His slight smile took on an edge of empathy. "I can hardly hear myself in here. There is a quieter room, this way."

We left the party through large double doors, went down a long, half-lit hallway and into another living area identical to the one I had shared, except nobody lived here. Gundar carried in two full glasses of champagne, which he set down on the low table. He sat on the couch, beckoning me to the chair beside him. "Have you learned anything, do you think, about Helen Laffin? You would have thought about her husband."

"Quite a lot. I'm sorry for him. His wife had shut herself off altogether. He couldn't have done a thing to get through to her. She'd gone numb, to him, to life. Maybe he let her slip away."

"Reasonably accurate—for an amateur psychiatrist." He lifted one of the champagne glasses in a mock toast. "You couldn't have known the damage you were causing that night by arguing with me. I knew what the woman was like, that she had as you say 'gone numb.' But you were still under the erroneous impression that this is a prison camp, that people are kept here against their will."

"What about me?"

"You are a special case, Carl, to me. Nevertheless, the most you've

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done is refer to leaving in a jocular manner, mostly in your diary. Had you noticed that? You've never demanded that we let you go, despite all your references to it."

I realized he was right. What, then, had I been railing against? Why hadn't I tried to leave?

"Let me tell you something about myself, Carl. Something you won't even have suspected." He looked at me for awhile before going on. "I was one of the *first* people diagnosed as having *abditosis*. One of the first sent here. That was in '23. As you can see, I survived. My survival was accidental.

"I had been a surgeon, first in Bonn, then in London. By nature, surgeons tend to maintain a certain distance from other people as a matter of self-defense, a protective device that can also lead to swift self-annihilation. And a person with a tendency toward *abditosis* who becomes a surgeon is probably going to show symptoms. When I was sent here, I was much like you were. Argumentative, strong willed, but only with regard to staying cut-off from any emotional commitment.

"At that time, they weren't pairing us off, trying to push patients toward emotional expression. I was watching people fall apart all around me. Some could no longer eat, others had circulatory breakdowns—yes, I know: you've seen nothing of that, but I assure you it's been going on around you very quietly while you've sealed off. Anyway, such things made no sense to anyone. The areas of deterioration involve processes that are autonomic. But, why? I started watching the others. The solution wasn't easy to reach, either, because it meant I had to admit that I, too, had sealed myself off. I experienced great catharsis, much as you've done. You must forgive my indiscretion, but you seemed on the brink of recovery and I had to know, and read your diary."

"Recovery? But my seizure—"

"You had no seizure. You aren't one of the stubbornly hypochondriachal so I know you won't cling to such delusion. Bree is a good doctor, well-meaning and all that, but she is also stubbornly determined to find a physical cause for *abditosis*, a trigger such as with cancers. She and I do not see eye to eye on this. In spite of overwhelming data to the contrary, she is certain you had, as she puts it, 'an attack.' In fact, what you most probably had was a fainting spell brought on by hyperventilation, which wouldn't have happened in the first place except that her incompetent paingate chip kept you from getting an alarm bell that would have slowed your breathing down. She got the bell instead. That device should be modified, limited, or done away with altogether if you could ever convince her that the patients should monitor themselves. It couldn't have come at a worse time for you, for which I'm very sorry. All we can hope now is that Andrea Foster has committed herself to you to the same degree you have done to her. I will tell you that she wanted to see you all this last week but Bree forbade her on grounds that her presence might be aggravating to your deterioration. That was why she was moved out. I'm sorry, Carl, that I lack control over so many events.

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I took control of your treatment after reading your profile, and that kept you from receiving any of several drug therapies Bree had in mind for you. I was even responsible for your performing as psychiatrist, which did not achieve results. That is often true with experiments. I am something of an iconoclast here at Pregad, whereas Bree has carefully courted our board of directors. She has even lobbied—is that the word?—that I am self-deluded because of my own experiences here as a patient. She calls me a faith healer."

"What if they throw you out?"

"They might, except that my success rate has been remarkably high. Much more so than hers. But I am not looking for the miracle drug cure or the genetic flaw that allows the weakness to exist, what is in this case a matter of treating symptoms but not cause. I am attempting a much greater cure." He laughed slightly at himself. "I'm trying to restructure society."

For awhile I just stared at him in awe. He grew embarrassed enough to talk about it. "Many of the patients in there are classified already as third-stage patients, doomed to enter a wing of this clinic that you have never seen. Nor would you care to. Everyone was told to form a social bond, something asked of every group. Most of them do exactly that, with no more thought than if they were gluing together two pieces of wood. Their relationships are shallow, thoughtless, and convenient, as lacking in commitment as the relationships they abandoned outside. After all, they've come here to die, not to discover new reasons to live.

"I fear that mankind has duped itself into thinking that security can be found in acquiescent non-involvement. I firmly believe *abditosis* has always been with us but simply went unexposed until all accountable physical diseases were eliminated. In essence, the mind is judging itself unfit and then carrying out its own execution through means available to it. The cause of *abditosis*, ultimately, is the victim's clever ability to remain detached and unaffected in all situations. This has been revealed as mankind's suicidal Janus."

"What about me?"

"Your personality has already shifted. You noticed it yourself in your writings. You've taken a risk, formed a bond with something that causes you to direct yourself, to live. Nevertheless, once we've sent you home there is always the chance you will return to your former isolated rut. You can always withdraw—it is always the easier choice. I can't stop you if you choose to do so. Of course, your peers will likely suspect you once again and throw you out. Like me, you are not quiet in your rebellion. You make waves. Enemies." He smiled.

"Andrea?"

"As for Miss Foster, as I said, nothing is determined yet. For your sake, and hers, I hope she chooses survival along with you instead of the possibility of becoming a second-stage patient here."

"You mean she's not?"

"Not at present. Second-stage is a label for those who show an unre-

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mitting pursuit of decline which can be plotted with very precise accuracy. You were both second-stage at some point. Now you are only first-stage, Carl, but in a sense you will always be first-stage because we know the tendency—and I'm certain there *is* some genetic explanation—the tendency exists in you. You have been first-stage since the day the witch hunters signed your commitment papers. Yet, the sub rosa truth is that we all might share the tendency."

"Bastard," I said, but not with any anger.

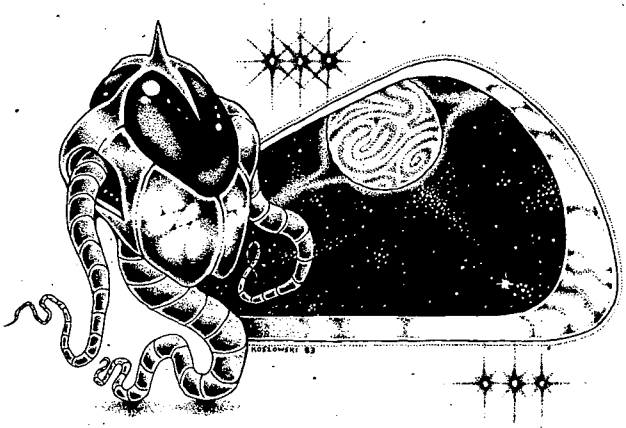
"Regrettably true. But what if you hadn't changed, ha?" He shrugged, then lifted his great body off the couch. "I'm going to leave you now. Miss Foster will shortly know where you are. The choice remains hers."

"It always was."

"No, Carl. Not always." He turned away and shuffled out the door, strong but tired under the weight of us all.

I leaned back in my chair and rolled the stem of my glass back and forth between my fingers. I stared down into the golden depths, watched little bubbles climb to the surface just to burst apart. I can't recall all I was thinking then: You can sort through a universe of jumbled things in a room alone, waiting. But I remember the exact moment I understood what Gundar's plan was, what he meant. He meant that in order to save ourselves, we had to *care* enough to want to be saved. I maybe dwelled on that for hours, I don't know.

An eternity later, so quietly at first I didn't notice, the door opened. ●



MARTIN GARDNER (from page 152)

SECOND SOLUTION TO SATAN AND THE APPLE

The event is: You will write "No" inside the rectangle.

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Job: A Comedy of Justice
By Robert A. Heinlein
Del Rey, $16.95

"Believe!" is the command of the science fiction writer, one of whose prime duties is to make the reader believe the unbelievable, accept the unacceptable, swallow the unswallowable. That's part of the talent of being an SF writer, and a *sine qua non* of the field. There are other forms of unrealistic fiction, which can be technically called fantasy, where that does not necessarily apply. The fable is a prime example. One doesn't for a minute accept the reality of Aesop's instructive little animals, or, for that matter, those on that farm of George Orwell's. The whole point is different. "I'm telling you this tall story for your amusement," says the author, "and maybe sneak in an instructive moral which you can apply to reality. But *this* is *not* reality, so don't try to suspend your disbelief."

Robert A. Heinlein in the past has set some sort of standards for enforcing believability on the reader. His acute sense of the little details that would make up a future or alien milieu made us, for instance, feel what traveling in space would be like long before such a thing had happened; the space missions and shuttle flights just more or less confirmed what we early readers of Heinlein already knew, and when there are luxury liners plying the space lanes, well, we know about that already, too, thanks to RAH.

But now in his latest novel, *Job: A Comedy of Justice*, Heinlein has presented us with a fable, a direction in which he has been heading for some time. Though using some of the devices familiar from the time when he wanted us to believe him, he in effect is telling us a tall story, for our amusement and edification. It's something of a relief, since his more recent books (with the possible exception of *Friday*) have been somewhere in between, straining our credulity but not out-and-out admitting to being "fabulous."

Alexander Hergensheimer, on a cruise in Polynesia, makes an idiotic bet that he can firewalk as the natives do at a "ceremony" arranged for the tourists; he accomplishes it with no injury but faints dead away afterwards. Only slowly

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does it dawn that he is in a different universe when he comes to. He is now Alec Graham, and there are as many differences from as similarities to his world in the world he's now in. They don't travel by air at all, for instance (in his world dirigibles are common); William Jennings Bryan had never been elected president; and while *his* North American Union is a God-fearing, fundamentalist, conservative state, this world's United States of North America is a swinging culture, infinitely shocking to the puritanical Alex.

Nevertheless, he becomes involved with Margrethe, a stewardess on the ship. He passes for "Alec Graham" while he tries to figure out the universe he's in, and what to do about his predicament. Uselessly, it turns out, since one night while in bed with Margrethe, there is a shipwreck. The two drift on a flotation pad for a day, are rescued by the Mexican Coast Guard, and realize that the Mexico they're in is not of either of their universes. For one thing, this place has things called airplanes, which neither of them has ever seen.

And so it goes. No sooner have they just settled into one universe than they're jolted into another, usually without money or belongings.

Alex falls back on his rigorous Christian upbringing and figures that this mischief is one of the signs and portents of the Second Coming, and by golly, he's right. In one universe, they discover a gospel tent, and just as Alex rises to reaffirm his faith, the Second Trump sounds.

Up he goes to New Jerusalem (aka Heaven), but is separated from Margrethe on the way, and after acquiring a robe and halo (harps optional), raises Hell—er—makes an issue of finding her. Heaven after the Resurrection is something of a mess, due to the influx of emigrants. Alex has to struggle with snotty angels and bureaucracy, even going to St. Peter, a nice guy who likes Coca-Cola, who checks with the Holy Ghost (on the phone . . . "Charlie, give me the Spook"). Margrethe is not in Heaven, so Alex goes to Hell, which is not all it's cracked down to be; it's something of a jovial anarchy, and Satan is a pleasant, put-upon fellow, whom Alex has met before, in one universe's Texas.

All is made clear when Satan takes Alex to meet a higher Power (like a boy taking his pet to the vet, he explains). Satan's brother Yahweh is also present (also Loki and Odin); Alex's trials are the result of a contest between the two brothers, just as were Job's.

Heinlein finds plenty of room in all this to comment on various aspects of humanity. He injects a fair amount of broad humor—the angels are a snobbish and literal-minded lot, and Yahweh delivers his dialogue in a vaudeville Yiddish accent ("Oy! Every prophecy I fulfilled. . . . This is justice?"). I kept being reminded of that joke of the 1950s that was so iconoclas-

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tically funny then, the punchline of which was "Well, to begin with, She's colored."

Not for a moment do you believe a word of it—and whether you're amused depends on what you find amusing; humor is the great indefinable. At a guess, if you're diverted by irreverent fables that takes swipes at religion, and particularly Christianity, this is for you. If you're looking for the enforced *verismo* of a *Starship Troopers* or *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, you'll need the patience of you-know-who to get through it.

The Continent of Lies
By James Morrow
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $15.95

Then there's that brand of nonrealistic fiction known as allegories. "Allegories give me the hives," says the lead character of James Morrow's *The Continent of Lies*, a critic named Quinjin. Most SF readers feel the same way, so it's maybe dangerous to note that Morrow has come *that* close to giving us a science fictional allegory. Perhaps satire is the better word; however you view it, Morrow's novel has Meaning and a Message For Our Time. It rolls along with that above-mentioned lack of reality and the sort of slightly dated, hipper-than-thou humor one associates with the 1960s writers who championed the counterculture and never gave up.

Perversely, that's exactly what *The Continent of Lies* is about —reality. Quinjin is a critic of dreambeans, aka cephapples, aka brainballs. These are biologically created fruits that can be programmed to give the eater coherent, realistic "dreams," so real that they replace books, movies, or any form of external entertainment. (Typically, Morrow fudges any convincing explanation of these objects, explaining them vaguely with "the inducing of narrative hallucinations became a mere matter of blazing the right enzymatic trails" and ". . . the only art form ever derived from recombinant DNA.") An important point, however, is that the partaker still keeps his identity and a certain distance from the action, while still being a participant.

But a nefarious strain has shown up that totally absorbs the "viewer," and usually destroys his mind in the process, resulting in such things as the Vorka massacre in which some 400 people in the Vorka Psychoparlor went simultaneously and permanently bananas. Quinjin is commissioned by the inventor of the dreambean to find this rogue development and those responsible; he "views" the mad-making bean (titled "The Lier In Wait") and survives intact, thanks to the beautiful psychobiologist, Urilla Aub. Accompanied by Urilla and a superrobot named Iggi, he is off on his quest, through the underground of bootleg bean runners and collectors, who hold conventions and tend to dress up as their favorite dreambean characters (does that sound familiar?). All this takes place in a slightly mad galaxy of

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space yachts and matter transmission, and the quest is enlivened with space pirates (who pirate dream beans, of course) and the dramatic development of Quinjin's teen-aged daughter imbibing "The Lier In Wait," her cure resting on the finding of the parent tree.

Despite the above carping, though, *The Continent of Lies* is good fun. Morrow's tendency to forced acronyms (Iggi is really Intelligence Gathering and Grouping Interface, the organization SUPEREGO is the Society for Unconditionally Purging Entertainment by Restoring Ethics and Godly Order) and awkward combined words (an "abstractectonic" sculpture) is balanced by a good deal of true wit, intelligence and invention. I must admit a personal bias in his choice of a critic as hero—much is made of the problems of reviewing things for a living, and Morrow has it all right. And the story lurches along from one incident to the next merrily if not all that convincingly, and one doesn't have to mind the parallels for our time.

Though given the further developments of substitute realities above and beyond movies and TV, such as computer-simulated airplane landing games, maybe one should.

Birds of Prey
By David Drake
Baen Books, $14.95 (cloth), $7.95 (paper)

Blood and thunder need not be thud and blunder if done with intelligence and flair, and David Drake has proved in the past that he can do it that way. His latest, *Birds of Prey*, is bloody and thunderous, and might be titled *Romans-6, Aliens-0* since it entertains the rather original premise of the Roman Empire ca. the third century A.D. having at some rather repulsive alien invaders.

It is, of course, Decline and Fall time, and the Empire is definitely cracking around the edges (and toward the middle, for that matter).

Imperial agent Aulus Perennius, cynical, approaching middle age, and furiously impatient at the signs of corruption and decay all around, is peevish as hell at being recalled from a promising mission against the Autarch Odenath of Palmyra. He is less peeved than baffled when he is assigned, by orders of the Emperor, to accompany a foreigner, one Calvus, to Cilicia (Southern Turkey) to search and destroy a dangerous "cult" out to undermine the Empire.

He is more than baffled when he and Calvus are attacked while still in Rome and the attacker turns out to be a creature like no man nor beast he has ever seen, wielding strange weapons which Calvus is just able to best. Off they go to Cilicia in a ship of the Imperial navy with military escort, but what with pirates, shipwrecks, fanatical Christian sects that believe in crucifying strangers, and other assorted menaces, the two arrive with only a couple of comrades to face the dragon and the five re-

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maining "cultists," who have laid millions of eggs.

The cultists are aliens, of course, and Calvus an agent from the future, come to stop them. Aulus accepts all this quite intelligently within the limited sphere of his culture's knowledge. We perhaps forget that the past, less bound to empirical knowledge than we, would accept more unlikely things than folks of our time are likely to.

The problem with *Birds of Prey* is its shape. Drake knows his Romans, and the setting is detailed and convincing. But it's mostly an historical novel with some science-fictional trimmings; after the opening meeting with the initial alien, most of the book is concerned with the journey, and only an occasional note of Calvus's unusual talents reminds the reader that this is an SF novel. There is a brief encounter with a "sea serpent," a marine dinosaur that Calvus casually deduces to be a side effect of the time traveler's arrival, but it isn't until the final tangle with the "dragon" (really an allosaurus) and the aliens that science fiction comes to the fore again. And there's a lot that's vague about that aspect—it's never really made clear why the future is changing the past, for instance. Future humanity seems alive and well enough to have developed and sent Calvus, certainly. Playing with time can get very tricky without some very good explaining.

There may not be enough SF here to really satisfy the aficionado, and maybe too much for the historical novel buffs, who usually demand realism and accuracy. Oh, well, the blood-and-thunder crowd will like it.

The Last Cat Book
By Robert E. Howard, illustrated by Peter Kuper
Dodd, Mead; $5.95 (paper)

Robert Howard does a T.S. Eliot?!? Not one of your more likely publishing events of the year. Let me explain.

Howard wrote an essay about cats called (typically) "The Beast from the Abyss" which apparently did not see print until its publication in 1971, in a periodical devoted to Howardiana. (Robert Howard, for those of you who have been raised in a barrel, is the creator of Conan et al.) It is typically Howard. The cat is "a green-eyed, steel-thewed fur-clad block of darkness hewed from the Pits which know not light, nor sympathy, nor . . ." and so on. The short piece consists of broad comments about cats such as the above, and reminiscences of cats Howard has known, characterized with the same heavy handedness.

I don't think Howard was *trying* to be funny; he was not known for his sense of humor (though here there are some clues that the attempt was being made). Someone had the inspired idea of doing illustrations for this broadside, and Peter Kuper has come up with some delicious ones. On each page, a large drawing fiendishly illus-

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trates a paragraph or so of Howard's text. They are woodblocky crude, and terribly funny, particularly in combination with Howard's hard-breathing prose.

Like all art books, there's little point in trying to describe it. But take a look—humor, as noted above, is an individual matter. I found this unlikely volume funny; someone else might, too.

The Forgotten Planet
By Murray Leinster
Crown, $7.95

If there's anything as exciting for a reviewer as discovering a socko new book, it's *rediscovering* a socko old one. I'd appropriately forgotten *The Forgotten Planet* by Murray Leinster (Will F. Jenkins) except for some vaguely positive feelings which are usually dangerous when going back to a story; one is set up for disappointment.

Not in this case. What a well-preserved rouser it is! Its age is a little hard to determine. Like so many "novels" from the magazine period of short fiction, it is really several stories pasted together; in this case, three. The first two were published initially in 1920 and 1921; the third part saw publication in 1953—an in-between stretch of a third of a century! As a novel, however, it is almost seamless (Leinster updated and polished the earlier parts when it all came together.)

A nameless planet, ideally suited for life but without life, is "seeded" by interstellar humanity for future use. The lower forms of life—insects, fungi, arachnids, bacteria, some vegetation—are laid down over several centuries, but by accident the planet's records are lost, and nothing further is done with it. In the humid, swampy lowlands, the smaller forms of life, through mutation and with no natural, larger enemies, run amok, and the place becomes a nightmare of giant insects and huge lichens and mushrooms.

More centuries pass, and a spaceship is wrecked on the forgotten planet. Some humans survive; the story begins thirty generations later when small tribes of humans cower in groves of giant fungi and spend their lives avoiding the more dangerous of the huge insects with which they are surrounded.

The narrative follows one Burl, a young man who cowers with the rest until, having something of a genius for survival, he makes the simple discovery that one can act on as well as being acted on. It's oddly convincing because the series of adventures and confrontations that follow are all based on that one assumption. Burl is no superbeing, going from one discovery to the next, as in most primitive-man epics.

The other key to the story's believability is that insects act purely on a primitive, almost automatic instinctual level that, once understood, makes them a lot safer to cope with, no matter what their size, than more intelligent foes,

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such as mammals. For instance, it had never occurred to Burl to kill one of the giant spiders—humans never killed *anything*. But once the possibility was realized, added to the knowledge that the labyrinth spiders never left their funnel shaped web-lairs, the triumphant kill is made through the walls of the web. Not that this implies a total lack of peril—there are still hairsbreadth escapes on almost every page.

What makes *The Forgotten Planet* really special, however, is Leinster's vivid style. The steaming, crawling mass of fungi, giant cabbages, huge grubs, flies the size of Burl's head, enormous dragonflies, and foot-long ants is splendidly evoked. There is one unforgettable sequence of a hill-sized mass of fungus, so decayed that it spontaneously combusts into a sort-of living volcano, into which, at night, hordes of giant beetles and moths with thirty-foot wing-spreads throw themselves, as is the wont of the smaller editions of Earth. It is spectacular writing of the old school at its best.

Anyone who automatically dismisses science fiction from before the golden age of the 1940s as primitive and naive is in for a surprise with this one. Simple it may be; simple-minded it is not. This neat and inexpensive little hardcover edition is welcome; a mass market paperback would be doubly so. Hey, there, all you publishers with a schedule to fill: there are treasures in the attic.

Shoptalk . . . The Leinster book reviewed above is one of another set of releases in the spiffy series called Classics of Modern Science Fiction. Compact hard covers, they are eminently collectible; the other three latest titles are *The Classic Philip Jose Farmer 1964—1973*, *Unearthly Neighbors* by Chad Oliver and *The Paradox Men* by Charles L. Harness (Crown, each $7.95).

It had to happen. Submitted for review is the first piece of computer fiction. Admittedly it's for young children, but the potential is frightening. This one is called *Masters of the Galaxy* (for grades 2–6, International Software Systems, $29.95), and it's emphasized that it is a *story—not* a game. I don't claim to be an expert on literature for the under-12 set, but this one seems a bit comic-bookish (though come to think of it, given a lot of the stuff supposedly published for adults these days that I've beat my way through for this column . . . At least this has a choice of vocabulary levels). There *is* a neat little lesson on saying "Please" when the hero tries to consult the "computer spirits" in a decayed civilization. Each page has an illustration, which appears first as the text scrolls slowly onto the screen. But the major gimmick is that it's interactive; at certain key points the reader is asked if he/she wants to take this course of action or that.

One envisions adult fiction in this form in the future. What would a certain classic of the past be like

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if a certain author had been a prescient programmer? Says the screen: "Do you want to go to Trantor or Terminus at this point?" "Should the Foundation fight the Empire now or retreat temporarily?" "Is Ebling Mis the Mule?" "Should Arkady go with the kindly couple who have just offered her their help?" And we thought that science fiction already offered infinite possibilities.

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Sherlock Holmes Through Space and Time* edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg (St. Martin's, $14.95) ("There's no police like Holmes" as someone said).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●

NEXT ISSUE

After a three-year hiatus, Robert Silverberg returns to our pages in the February *IAsfm* with his stunning new novella, "Sailing to Byzantium." We think this is one of the finest stories we've seen and we're sure you won't want to miss it. February's issue also includes stories by Ben Bova, Marta Randall, Michael Swanwick, Lisa Goldstein, and others. Pick up your copy on January 15, 1985.

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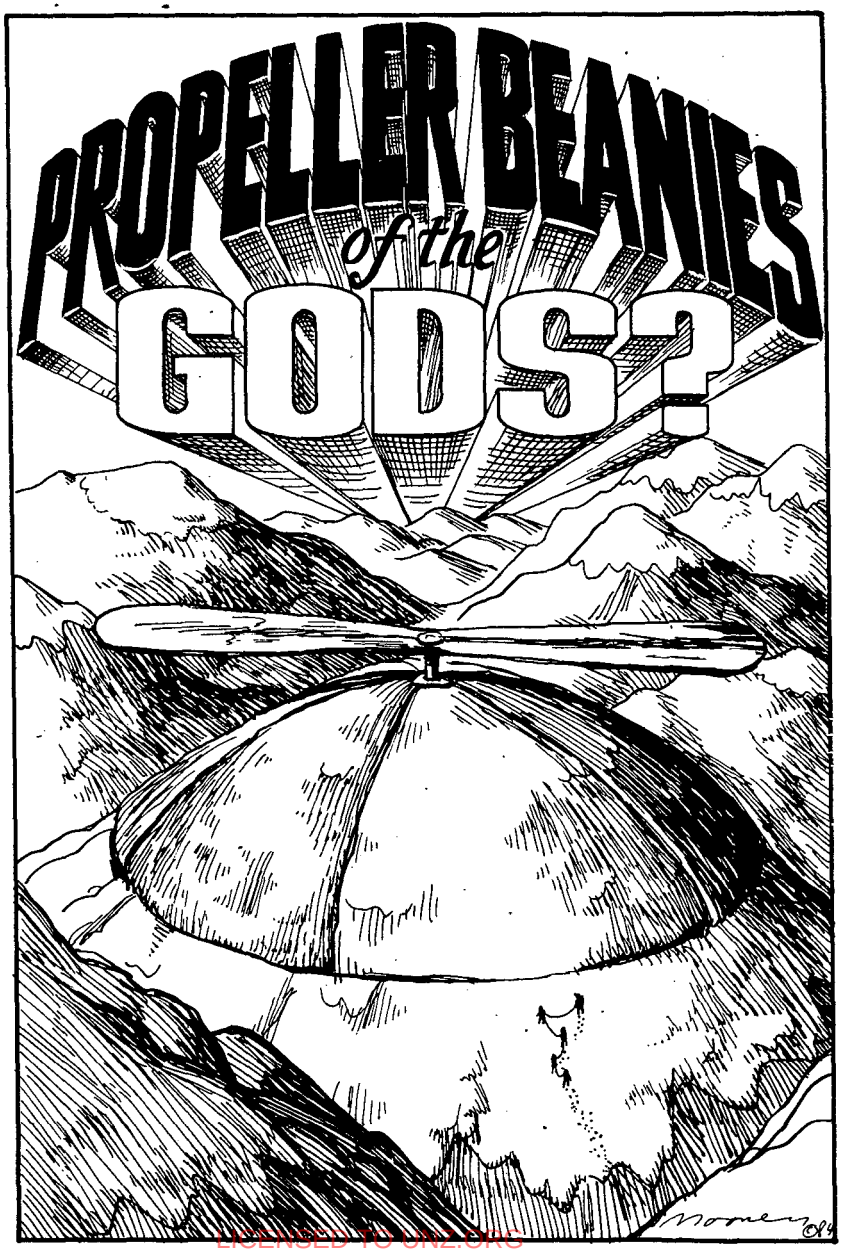

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Bishop, Michael "Light Years and Dark: Science Fiction Since 1960" (a) ..... Apr 46
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Boston, Bruce "Don't Drink the Sky at Myrmidon" (p) .... Jan 69
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Broderick, Damien "Resurrection" (s) ..... Aug 52
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Jacobson, Susanna (with Sharon Farber, James P. Killus, & Dave Stout) "Post Haste" (s) ..... Feb 113

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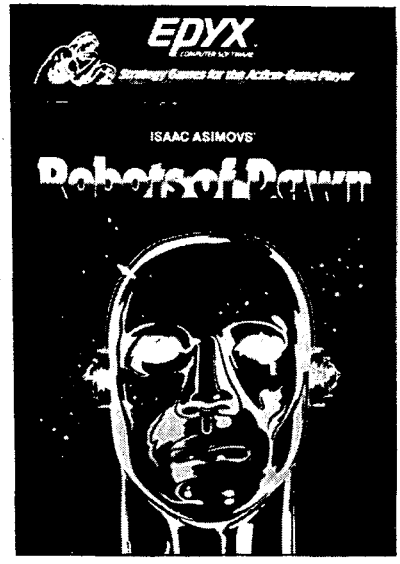
(continued from page 28)

member of the World Legislature of Aurora. He belonged to the Humanist Party, which believes that all planets should participate in space exploration. This view is very unpopular with the Globalists, the majority Party on the planet. The Globalists want space exploration to be an exclusive right of Aurorans. This is just one clue among the many you're presented before actually beginning the game.

The game includes a diskette for the Commodore 64 disk drive, plus a variety of printed matter: a letter from Elijah Baley, interplanetary detective of the Terrestrial Department of Justice on Earth, to his wife and son; a round trip ticket to Aurora; the front page of *Universe Today* newspaper with the story on Dr. Fastolfe's murder; a spacegram from his friend Daneel Olivaw who will meet Baley on Aurora; an urgent letter from Commissioner Wilson Roth informing "Earth's most famous detective" that the Aurorans consider the crime unsolvable and perhaps "you and your reputation will finally be cut down to size"; the rules sheet; a fact sheet on Aurora, its history and inhabitants; and six character sheets with information on Aurora's Chairman and the five suspects.

You face an interesting situation in *Robots of Dawn*. You are an alien on Aurora, and there are diplomatic considerations to your investigation—some methods of police work that would be proper on Earth can't be used here.

The five suspects include the ambitious director of the Robotics Institute, a surrogate daughter to Fastolfe who was accused of murdering her husband, a mysterious hair stylist, Fastolfe's daughter who opposed her father's politics, and the robot that was Fastolfe's partner and may have violated the Three Laws of Robotics.



The game is simple to play, but involves a lot of reading and thinking. You must ask the right questions and search each suspect's house for clues. There is an element of pressure regarding how long you can take for the investigation—someone is trying to kill you! After studying the information about each suspect you see, hear, or read about in the daily news, you can present your evidence to the Chairman of the World Legislature. You must show motive, means, and opportunity—wild guesses won't work.

No two games are exactly the same, so you won't exhaust playing *Robots of Dawn* after solving the crime once. There are some graphics, but this is primarily a text-puzzle. If you like a good mystery, a good SF novel, and a challenging game, *Robots of Dawn* might be what you're looking for. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

News flash: the Aussies have decided to move their 1985 National SF Con(vention) from Seattle back to Australia. So it goes. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing. For free listings, tell me about cons 6 months ahead. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

DECEMBER, 1984

28–30—**EveCon.** For info, write: **Box 128, Aberdeen MD 21001.** Or phone: **(301) 272–0950** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: McLean VA (near Washington DC) (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Westpark Hotel. Guests will include: none announced. Low-keyed (if early) "celebration of having survived 1984," which was ushered in by the first EveCon.

JANUARY, 1985

18–20—**ChattaCon, Box 921, Hixson TN 37343.** Chattanooga TN. C. J. ("Downbelow Station") Cherryh, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, Timothy Zahn. Pie-a-thon II is planned. Traditionally, the year's first con.

18–20—**RustyCon, Box 47132, Seattle WA 98146.** Gordon Eklund, Kevin Johnson, Steve Fahnestalk.

26–27—**ChimeraCon, c/o Wright, 102-D Todd, Carrboro NC 27510. (919) 967–3049.** Chapel Hill NC. K. E. Wagner, M. W. Wellman, Frances Garfield, Allen Wold, David Drake, M. A. Foster, Walter Meyers.

FEBRUARY, 1985

1–3—**Take My Con . . . Please, 6446 Colonial Knoll Glen Burnie, MD 21061.** Diane Duane, artist Phil Foglio. Theme: Humor in SF. From the folks who brought us Brave New Con a year ago. Masquerade.

1–3—**OmniCon, Box 970308, Miami FL 33197. (305) 253–6842.** T. Sturgeon, S. Sucharitkul, M. Whalen.

1–4—**Corflu, Box 590712, San Francisco CA 94159.** Napa CA. Suzanne (Suzie) Tompkins. The annual con by and for fanzine fans. Come and find out what original fandom was (and still is) all about.

8–10—**RubiCon, 2905-B Wintergarden, Lexington KY 40502.** Relaxed, party-oriented Southern con.

15–17—**Boskone, c/o NESFA, Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Boston MA. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, artist Carl Lundgren. The big Eastern regional convention (2000 to 3000 fans expected).

15–17—**ConTex, c/o Friends of Fandom, Box 772473, Houston TX 77215.** No more about this one yet.

AUGUST, 1985

27–26—**AussieCon Two, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230.** Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, editor/fan Ted White. Join for $50 to the end of 1984.

30–Sep. 2—**ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The North American SF Interim Con for 1985 (NASFIC's are held only in years when WorldCon is outside North America). 3000 fans expected.

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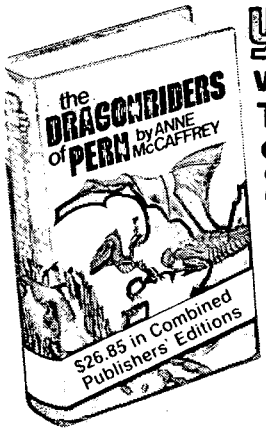

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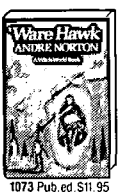

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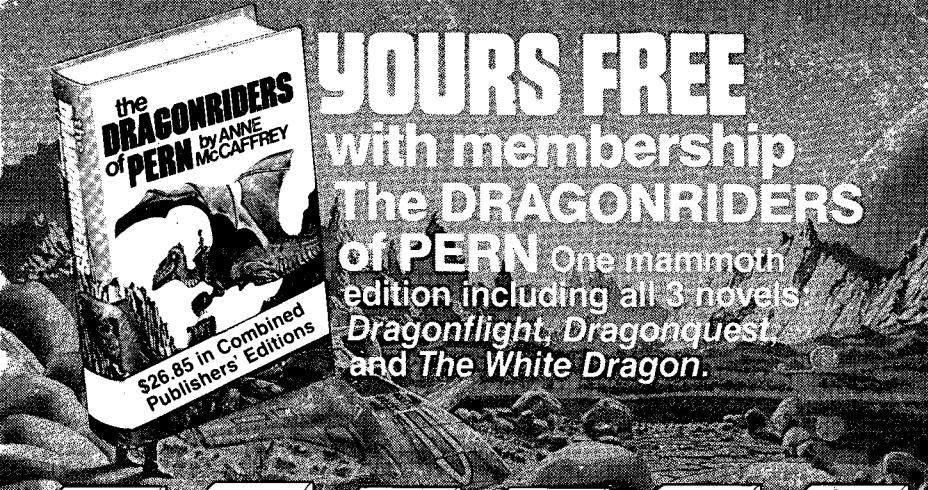

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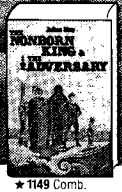

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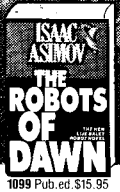

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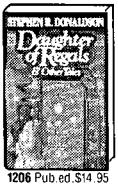

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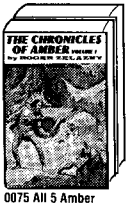

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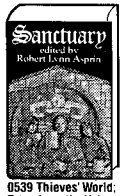

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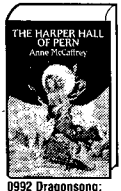

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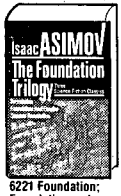

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